



Scrutiny Annual Report 2018-19



SCRUTINY IN GWYNEDD



Councillor
Simon Glyn



Councillor
Beth Lawton



Councillor
Eryl Jones-Williams



Councillor
R. Medwyn Hughes

Introduction - Chairs

We scrutinise in Gwynedd in an attempt to make a difference for the County's residents.

The role of scrutiny keeps the services at arm's length and offers independent recommendations in an attempt to improve services and hold Cabinet Members to account for their performance.

Members of the three scrutiny committees - Communities, Education & Economy and Care have worked tirelessly throughout the year in an attempt to make a difference for Gwynedd residents and we are very grateful to them. Thank you also to Members of the Audit and Governance Committee who have a role to scrutinise corporate matters as well as their auditing role.

An encouraging report was received from the Wales Audit Office that noted that our scrutiny procedures in Gwynedd showed an improvement. However, there is always room for further improvement and therefore, we continue to review our procedures to ensure that scrutiny fulfils its role of contributing to the process of providing the most effective services in future.

After two years chairing the scrutiny committees, it is time for us to hand over the reins to new chairs from May 2019 onwards. We wish all the best to those individuals who will undertake this important responsibility for the next two years.

We are also very grateful to Gwynedd residents, Cabinet Members, other agencies and officers who have supported our efforts in achieving the overall aim.

Councillor Beth Lawton
Chair of the Scrutiny Forum

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-chairs 2018-19

Communities Scrutiny Committee

Chair - Councillor Simon Glyn
Vice-chair - Councillor Mike Stevens

Care Scrutiny Committee

Chair - Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams
Vice-chair - Councillor Dewi Roberts

Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

Chair - Councillor Beth Lawton
Vice-chair - Councillor Paul Rowlinson

Audit and Governance Committee

Chair - Councillor R. Medwyn Hughes
Vice-chair - Councillor John Brynmor Hughes

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Care Scrutiny Committee

LEARNING DISABILITIES SERVICE.

In September 2018, a report and action plan by the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being, were considered following the inspection by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales of the Gwynedd Learning Disabilities Service.

Matters raised by Members of the Scrutiny Committee

- It was suggested that a more detailed look at the figures should be undertaken as well as an analysis of the reasons for refusing applications for assistance and support.
- Whilst being grateful for the additional work undertaken by some members of staff, the Cabinet Member was asked to consider if this was sustainable and to discuss this with third sector groups.
- Concerns were noted regarding the backlog of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards(DoLS) assessments. The Head agreed to bring information to the Chair regarding progress in this respect.
- The Department was asked to share information with the Committee about the multi-disciplinary Transformation Group.

The work that had been carried out over the past two and a half years in an attempt to address the recommendations in the service review was welcomed. The Committee was convinced that the service was proceeding in the right direction but, at the same time, it acknowledged that much work was still required.

COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT— ADULTS (2017-18)

In June 2018 the Annual Complaints Report (Adults) for 2017-18 was considered.

Main points from the discussion:

- The examples of letters of thanks within the report, which were extremely heartening, were welcomed.
- An assurance was given by the Cabinet Member that the Department took every complaint seriously and sought to resolve any problems promptly.
- It was suggested that it would be useful to note a target date for action in the “lessons to be learnt” log rather than to note 'as soon as possible' whilst stating the reason if there was any failure to act within the timetable.
- It was explained that it was difficult to gather statistics and data as a great deal of the complaints were presented informally and were resolved immediately by the relevant teams.
- A concern was noted regarding the lack of carers especially in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd and that this added to the number of complaints.

Resolved: To accept, note and give thanks for the report and positive responses, and to submit these to the Cabinet Member as part of his report to the Cabinet.

Homelessness

In September 2018, a report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure and Culture noting that Gwynedd Council had carried out a Strategic Review of Homelessness in accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act (2014). It was reiterated that the findings of the review set a foundation for developing a Homelessness Strategy and that the Housing Service was currently in consultation on local actions that would address the aims and requirements of the Strategy.

Reference was made to the executive summary included with the report that provided a detailed analysis of the levels and nature of homelessness, an audit of the services and review of the resources available to address homelessness in the County. It was reiterated that the executive summary provided evidence for the North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy alongside the Gwynedd Local Homelessness Provision Action Plan.

During the Committee's discussion, the following points were made by Members:

- The private sector provision needed to be considered - the need to ensure that the standard of the houses met the statutory requirements
- The review conveyed the problems but did not offer solutions
- It was necessary to bring more empty housing back into use
- Wylfa - needed to collaborate with Isle of Anglesey in an attempt to identify elements that would have an effect
- There was a need to share good practice with other Councils
- A suggestion to review the points system - the current system did not reflect the desperate situation of individuals / families
- Had the emergence of AirBnB reduced the number of properties available for homes ?
- Suggestion to create a list of available provision for the homeless according to area
- Was it possible for the Council to establish an arm's length company to provide social housing ?

The Cabinet Member stated that a review of the points system was under way and that there would be an opportunity to consult on the proposals. It was also highlighted that the Housing Strategy would soon be introduced and that this would identify specific areas to be addressed. This would provide an opportunity to consider alternative and creative ideas.

Resolved:

- **To accept the information**
- **To congratulate the Service for making it on to the 'Cymorth Cymru' shortlist**
- **To ask the Cabinet Member to address Members' observations in drawing up the Housing Strategy**



Autism

In September 2018, the reports of the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, and the Cabinet Member for Education were submitted.

Members' Observations

- That it was necessary to place more emphasis on supporting people before they get isolated and that early intervention saved money in the long term.
- To consider appointing a coordinating officer for autism services.
- That it was necessary to raise the awareness of schools about autism so that interventions can take place at schools where children are low on the spectrum.
- Members' concern regarding the future of the Autism Centre at Ysgol Coed Mawr, Bangor were noted whilst details and an update were requested from the Cabinet Member for Education.
- Concern was expressed regarding the inconsistency of the service and that harmonisation was required across schools.
- A detailed report was requested for the Committee in respect of children who receive out of county education.
- It was emphasised that the post of the Children and Families' Service Manager was key within the service; and in order to ensure continuation, a plea was made to retain the post following the current post-holder's retirement.
- Derwen staff were congratulated and thanked for their excellent work.

The fact was welcomed that there was collaboration between the three Departments and robust developments in terms of collaboration with the Health Board.



Young People leaving the Council's care



In January 2019, the report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People was submitted, providing the Committee with information on young people leaving care.

The Cabinet Member and officers expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from the Members. The following main points were highlighted during the discussion:-

- The success of the service offered to young people between 21 and 25 years old was highlighted through the fact that 38 of the 40 open cases had opted to continue to receive the support.
- The fact that the personal counsellors assisted the young people to claim the financial support available to them was welcomed.
- Support was expressed towards the collaboration arrangements with universities, that now acknowledged the situation of young care-leavers, e.g. through allowing the extension of the duration of their course.
- It was noted that it was evident that the Department's understanding of the young people's development had improved and that they therefore could give them appropriate support at the right time.
- It was suggested that the wording of the service's letter to care-leavers (included in the appendix to the report) was lengthy and complicated, and could be more inclusive. Nevertheless, the difficulty, due to the expectation for the letter to be in-keeping with the report of the Children's Commissioner, was acknowledged.
- The Members were glad to hear that an enthusiastic group of young people and workers were eager to re-establish a Young People Accommodation and Support Group. The intention to engage with these young people through social media was welcomed.
- The importance given to all individuals to achieve their full potential was emphasised and although this was measured by the department, it was not shown in the Government's statistics on looked-after children's GCSE results.

Other matters that have received attention from Members of the Care Scrutiny Committee

- Recruitment Difficulties - the reports of CELyn and the Mid Wales Care Health Board were awaited
- Social Services (Families and Adults) Complaints
- Case meetings in Pwllheli following the transfer from Frondeg to Ffordd y Cob
- Housing Allocation Policy
- Gwynedd Children and Families Services Survey
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Draft Housing Strategy

Other matters discussed for the Work Programme 2019-20

The following were referred to next year's Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Frondeg, Caernarfon - develop a new accommodation model for adults with learning disabilities.
- The Impact of Savings and Cuts - consider the impact of 10 years since introducing the first Savings Strategy in 2007 within the Care Sector.
- Children with Disabilities - need to give constant consideration as part of the reports and identify a specific subject for scrutiny.
- Obesity
- Assessment of Local Population Needs
- People who are not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETS)
- Children and Families Services Overspend

Matters referred to others

Matters referred on to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee:

Children and Young People's Mental Health

Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

This year many of the items the Committee has scrutinised have been considered on more than one occasion. Furthermore, many of the items which were scrutinised, as a result of the recommendations of the Committee, have led to specific information sessions for all Members. See the details below.



north wales economic ambition board
bwrdd uchelgais economaidd gogledd cymru

NORTH WALES ECONOMIC GROWTH PLAN

One of the major developments this year has been the regional work to establish the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. It is an extremely exciting development for the County as well as the region as a whole. The Scrutiny Committee has considered the matter on more than one occasion and has stated:

- That economic benefit will come to Gwynedd as a result of the developments
- That financial risks need to be addressed
- That the Welsh Language has a status at the Joint Committee and is key to all the arrangements
- That the governance arrangements need to be challenged in order to ensure political accountability for regional developments within the Authority.

It was also recommended that Gwynedd Council undertakes the role of the host authority for the development. We are very pleased that the Council has undertaken this responsibility.

Since this is such a crucial development, Committee members were of the opinion that it was key that all Gwynedd councillors should be aware of these developments. Therefore, several sessions were held for all the Members in order to raise awareness and ensure a full understanding of that which the Plan is endeavouring to fulfil.

Education in Gwynedd

EDUCATIONAL RESULTS - SUMMER 2018

The Committee looked at the Summer results across the age ranges. It was reported as follows:

- The significant reduction in the results for English, Key Stage 4 (GCSE) and the change without any notice in the subject's grade boundaries were noted.
- Concern was noted regarding the significant impact on those individuals who had received a qualification in the Summer of 2018 and the Cabinet Member was asked to discuss this with Qualifications Wales to ensure that there would be no changes in grade boundaries, to the same extent, in any subject in the future.
- In addition, Committee members noted the impact this has on our teachers who work hard to try and ensure that our young people succeed.

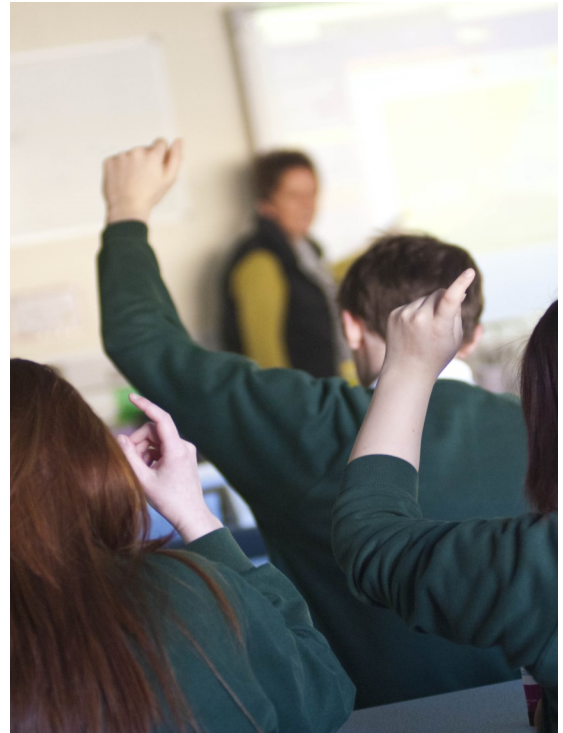
Furthermore, during the year, attention was given to educational attainment in general, and Members have expressed their frustration with the new reporting requirements on performance and the difficult task we have as Members to scrutinise attainment. The Committee is eager to scrutinise results in order to ensure fair play to all the young people of Gwynedd as well as ensure that appropriate support is given to attain the required quality in each school.



The Committee is also aware that there are far reaching changes afoot in the Education sector. Once again, Committee members were of the view that this was a specific matter that was of interest to all Members. A specific session was held for all Members to receive information about these developments with an opportunity to ask questions to officers of both the Department and GwE about the preparatory work.

Reducing Teachers' Workload

A session was held to scrutinise the work being done to reduce teachers' workload (in particular those leading within our schools). It was noted that good work has already been done to reduce duplication and provide a platform for school leaders to share good practice. Committee Members were glad to see that this work has been done but noted that further work remains in order to reduce the administrative burden on school leaders in future and in recognition that there are consistently more requirements on their time.



Language Centres

The Scrutiny Committee had an opportunity to scrutinise developments within the language centres sector before the matter was discussed by the Cabinet. High praise was given to the work of the centres during the discussion.



School Meal Debts

It came to the attention of the Committee that a considerable debt was accruing in respect of payment for pupils' school meals. This matter was scrutinised and the service was challenged to get to grips with the matter before families faced huge debts that could not be repaid. It was noted that there are measures in place to improve the situation, but there was also a focus on the need to deal with the situation in a sensitive manner and enable families to pay in instalments.

Brexit

2018/19 has been a year where Brexit developments have received considerable attention! The Scrutiny Committee has looked at the possible effect of Brexit in two specific areas, namely:

- the Council's support to small businesses to prepare for Brexit
- Gwynedd Council's preparations in terms of the possible implications of Brexit to services.

Please note - as this is an area where there are consistent changes to the guidance, the observations reflect the situation faced during 2018/19.

A significant part of the support available for businesses is provided on behalf of Welsh authorities by the Welsh Local Government Association. An officer from the Association visited the Council to provide an update to all Members on the guidance available, and an update was given by Council officers on the internal preparations for Brexit.



Biking event at Dinas Mawddwy

Impact of Events in Gwynedd

It was pleasing to be able to scrutinise the impact of events in Gwynedd and have an opportunity to fully understand how a small financial contribution from the Council can enable different parts of the County to benefit substantially.

Projects that currently receive support were scrutinised, and it was noted that all areas of Gwynedd were very active and in receipt of support for their activities.



Triple Crown in Abersoch

Other matters that have received attention from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

Only a snapshot of matters scrutinised by Members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee have been presented here. A number of other matters were addressed as noted below. Unfortunately, it was not possible to address everything and some matters were referred to the 2019-20 work programme.

OTHER MATTERS THAT WERE ADDRESSED:

- Pwllheli Hafan and Harbour
- The Role of Area Regeneration Officers
- Gwynedd Healthy Living Centres
- Additional Learning Needs Draft Code
- Education Annual Report

MATTERS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN PROGRAMMED FOR ATTENTION IN 2019-20:

- Secondary Sector Language Strategy
- Primary Sector Welsh Language Charter
- Benefiting from Tourism

Communities Scrutiny Committee

Food Standards Agency Audit

A report by the Cabinet Member was submitted on the progress made to address 34 recommendations published by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) following an audit of the Council's food law enforcement provision. A report was provided on the progress made to meet the recommendations in accordance with the plan to the Communities Scrutiny Committee, which met on the 10th October 2017.

In February 2018, FSA officers revisited the Service to assess further progress on the improvement plan. It was reported that 20 of the recommendations still required further action.



RESOLVED:

To accept the content of the report of the Cabinet Member for the Environment, and acknowledge that the Council was unable to meet its statutory responsibilities in the field of Food Standards.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee wished to draw the Cabinet Members' attention to their responsibility in this field, and recommended that they contact Welsh Government immediately to request further resources to meet the statutory requirement.

Delegation Procedure for Planning Applications

The Head of the Environment Department submitted a report which responded to concerns regarding the delegation procedure in the context of decisions relating to Plas Pistyll. As part of the report, a detailed account of the application's planning history was noted, along with the current and previous Planning Delegation Schemes in Gwynedd. The Cabinet Member noted that he had commissioned a piece of work to gather information that would respond to the local discontent and the lack of understanding of how the decision had been made, and to identify whether the delegation procedure had been followed properly.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

A report was presented by Gwynedd Consultancy highlighting the implications to the Council and developers from implementing Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. In accordance with the Act, new developments would have to contain Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) features that satisfied national standards. It was noted that all Local Authorities were required to establish a body that would accept, approve, adopt and enforce SuDS features, in accordance with the new Regulations - which was the Sustainable Drainage Systems Approval Body (SAB).

During the Committee's discussion, the following points were highlighted :

- Developers were facing increased pressure and costs
- The costs would add to the sale price of houses and it would, therefore, be impossible to provide affordable houses
- This was a further statutory requirement imposed on an Authority without further funding
- There was a need to ensure good and transparent arrangements and to establish a good relationship with developers

Smallholdings

A report was presented by the Senior Property Manager detailing the principles of managing the Council's smallholdings estate. It was noted that a comprehensive review had been held in 2008 to look at the purpose of the estate, its financial performance and the management arrangements. A decade had passed since the review, therefore it was considered timely to revisit the issue and confirm the logic behind the importance of continuing to provide the County's smallholdings.



Following discussions it was resolved to accept the report and to recommend to the Cabinet Member to consider establishing one cross-County panel with a clear constitutions, to establishing an arm's length company in the longer term, to retain the temporary staff resource and reinvest in the estate any profit beyond the figure allocated.

Planning and the Welsh Language

- Planning laws in Wales are complex and sometimes difficult to understand.
- Effective land use planning could contribute to robust economic development, to retaining natural assets and improving the quality of life of individuals and communities.
- National planning policy provides the policy framework for local planning authorities to prepare their Development Plans effectively, and they are supplemented by Technical Advice Notes (TAN) on specific subjects.
- Additionally, local authorities can prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to help ensure that the policies are better understood.
- The Gwynedd and Anglesey Joint Local Development Plan 2011 - 2026, was adopted in July 2017.
- A Scrutiny Investigation was established on 7 December 2017 to contribute to the process of producing the Guidance on Maintaining and Creating Distinctive and Sustainable Communities.
- The Investigation's recommendations were submitted to the Joint Planning Policy Committee on 24 April 2018.

The recommendations were:

- To hold a public consultation on developments of 10+ houses in urban areas and 5+ houses in rural areas.
- A Language Statement and Language Assessment for each development that is subject to a public consultation.
- Ensure that there is input from external experts on Linguistic Planning, Research, Analysis, Consultation and Engagement.
- The above-mentioned experts to be given an opportunity to contribute to the pre-consultation draft Guidance in order to maximise the value of the consultation.



Other matters that have received attention from the Communities Scrutiny Committee

Public Services Board — To consider the Gwynedd and Anglesey Well-being Plan's Priority Projects

Waste Enforcement — Background information was considered and an Investigation was established in 2017. The Investigation continues.

Public Toilets — The draft Toilets Strategy was scrutinised and recommendations were made to the Cabinet.

Crime and Disorder — the Annual Report of the Crime and Disorder Partnership was considered. The members were happy with the Partnership's work.

Parking Management Arrangements — options were considered for generating parking income and funding developments including electric car charging points across the County.

Converting Agricultural Buildings — information and the obstacles for local people were considered, and in 2017 the Cabinet Member was asked to lobby the Government in order to improve the situation.

Over-development of Caravan Sites

Transport

Animal Health and Welfare