CONCISE VERSION

Mi allwch ddarllen y ddogfen yma yn Gymraeg hefyd. Ewch nôl i'r dudalen we, a chliciwch ar y botwm iaith ar dop y dudalen.

Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25

CYNGOR GWYNEDD

Scrutiny Workshops

In April 2024, workshops were held to produce a draft work programme for 2024/25 for each Scrutiny Committee. Before the Scrutiny Forum had an overview of the work programme as a whole.

The factors that were addressed when prioritising items for the year were:

- Does the matter affect a large proportion of the population?
- Can scrutiny make a difference / have an influence? (people / service / performance)
- Is it timely to scrutinise the matter?
- Is the matter a priority for the Council?
- Are we clear about what we are trying to improve?

Scrutiny Forum

Meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees, its role is to:

- Advise on PRIORITISING scrutiny items (the majority being formal scrutiny with a small number of investigations) and challenge the basis on which items have been identified for scrutiny.
- Identify the most effective scrutiny method within the resources available (formal scrutiny / investigation)
- Identify items that are purely for information, seeking to avoid using scrutiny arrangements to achieve the information-sharing role.
- Assess the contributions of the individual committees and assess the IMPACT of the scrutiny work and review our scrutiny arrangements continuously.

Four meetings were held during 2024/25, where consideration was given to the scrutiny work programme; developments in the field of scrutiny; the scrutiny arrangements of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee; the content of the annual report; and resources were prioritised to undertake a Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation and a Task and Finish Group - Draft Education Language Policy.

ITEMS SCRUTINISED DURING 2024/25

Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

Education Department, Economy and Community Department, GwE, North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Leadership Team and Legal, Corporate Services Department, Finance Department, the Council's Internal Operation and Partnerships

Item	Reason for scrutiny	Impact of Scrutiny
GwE Annual Report	Annual Item / Assurance	Scrutiny at the end of a period, commenting on what has been achieved.
Middle Tier Review – Schools Improvement Service	Input to the future direction	Early input from the Scrutiny Committee into how the schools improvement service will be provided in future.
Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools	Assurance in terms of the arrangements	It was recommended that the Education Department provides a simple guide with regard to referring concerns, for use by everyone who is involved with the system, such as governors and parents. Identified the need to consider looking further at this area, which led to establishing the Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation.

Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan 2035	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Prosperous Gwynedd	The Eryri National Park Authority was asked to make every effort to consult with the county's councillors where appropriate. Also, that the Economy and Community Department, while undertaking research, looks at the specific issues raised by the committee regarding data etc.
Progress report on the response to Estyn recommendations	External Auditor's Report	Receive assurances that work is being done in response to the challenges in the field and determining that this area must be scrutinised in the future to ensure progress.
Transforming education for children in their early years	Council Plan 2023-28 - Gwynedd Yfory	Identify concern regarding a lack of resources to move the work forward. The committee welcomed the intention to cooperate more widely with other relevant agencies and requested an update.
Staff Well-being Strategy	Pre-decision Scrutiny / Scrutiny of staff well-being support	Ensure that the strategy meets the challenges in terms of the post-pandemic repercussions on the workforce and the costs of staff absences due to illness. To note concern about the high levels of staff absences and request that future updates on the strategy detail specific data, such as comparison over periods of time, etc
Schools' Revenue Budgets	Impact on Gwynedd schools	To receive confirmation of the financial situation of Gwynedd schools overall. Reinforce the need for the committee to scrutinise the draft Education Strategy when timely.
Education Transport	Overspending in the field	Highlight the need to be aware of the specific needs of certain groups of children when planning provision. Note the importance of the travel to college provision for young people in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd.

		Request that the Cabinet Member for Education contacts the Welsh Government in the context of introducing a free travel pass for young people aged 16-21 years old to reduce the pressure on the Council to provide free transport, and to facilitate travel to work, college or sixth form.
Gwynedd Economy Plan	Pre-decision Scrutiny / Strategic Plan	Scrutiny input on the direction of the work and highlight further matters that should be considered in creating the Plan. It was decided that the Committee would scrutinise the draft plan during 2025/26.
Education Language Policy – The Engagement Procedure and Draft Policy	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Welsh Gwynedd	Recognise the need to look in more detail at the Draft Education Language Policy. Request to the Scrutiny Forum that resources are prioritised for the formation of a task and finish group, to examine the wording of the draft policy and consider whether suggestions need to be made to the Cabinet Member / Education Department, reporting back to the committee at the 19 June 2025 meeting.
Immersion Education System	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Welsh Gwynedd	Decide to scrutinise the Action Plan for Implementing the Recommendations for Improving the Immersion Education System.
Youth Service	Council Plan 2023-28 - Gwynedd Yfory	Recommend to the Cabinet Member / Education Department that it is necessary to ensure consistency of provision across the County; identify ways of engaging more widely with young people and in particular specific groups of young people; a need to engage with Town and Community Councils with a view to increasing the number of community clubs; and to continue to work with partners to ensure the best provision.

Additional Learning Needs in mainstream and Special Schools	Scrutiny of additional learning needs (ALN) education provision	Ask the Education Cabinet Member to look at ways to improve the provision and make things easier for children in the mainstream who have intense needs but do not reach the threshold to receive support; look at ways to continue protecting the budget for special schools and monitor that money is spent appropriately and according to guidelines; correspond with the Welsh Government to express concern about the lack of funding and resources available for ALN and the challenges facing schools.

Communities Scrutiny Commitee

Environment Department, Highways, Engineering and YGC (Gwynedd Consultancy) Department, Local Development Plan, Public Services Board, Crime and Disorder and the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan

Item	Reason for scrutiny	Impact of Scrutiny
Article 4 Direction – Public Consultation	Pre-decision Scrutiny / Council Plan 2023-28 – A Homely Gwynedd	Thorough pre-scrutiny to ensure that adequate consideration has been given to various factors. Recommend to the Cabinet that the direction be confirmed.
Ash Die-back Disease	A matter on the risk register	Receive assurance that progress is being made to mitigate the risk.

Parking Fees	Pre-decision Scrutiny	Recommend to the Cabinet that consideration should be given to increasing parking charges annually or biennially, taking into account the inflation situation; the enforcement arrangements in the short-stay car parks should not be modified because of the impact on the local economy; further increase of fees in car parks in certain tourist areas should be considered; and consideration should be given to an annual increase in Arosfan site fees.
Developments in the Public Transport field	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd	Highlight the need to involve local members as soon as possible when considering changes to bus services and the need to strengthen consultation arrangements with communities.
Waste Collection and Recycling Services	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd	Ensure there is progress on realising this priority project in the Council Plan.
Dog Control Orders	Assurance in terms of implementation	Recommend that the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department contacts Councillors to offer a supply of dog waste bags for use in their communities.
Planning and Welsh-speaking Communities	Assurance in terms of implementation	An example of good practice in focusing on one area. To ask the Welsh Government to review 'Planning Policy Wales' and 'Technical Advice Note (TAN) 20: Planning and the Welsh language' to ensure that the Welsh language receives proper consideration. To request that the Housing Associations provide data to the Council to assess information about the Welsh language in the planning field.

		As well as highlighting the need to liaise with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and Bangor University to encourage them to develop suitable training for assessing the linguistic impact of planning developments; the need to remind Community and Town Councils of their freedom to submit representations on the potential linguistic impact that local planning development may have on the area; and to give consideration to conducting language planning training for Councillors.
Annual Update by the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership	The Committee's role as a Crime and Disorder Committee	Receive assurance as to the Partnership's work over the period along with the priorities and direction of the work for the future. To recommend that the Partnership adds preventative work linked to sexual offences as a specific future priority.
Climate and Nature Emergency Plan: Annual Report 2023/24	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd	Recommend that more information be included in the Annual Report about what is responsible for the carbon emission percentages. To ask the Council Leader to lobby the Welsh Government in relation to reviewing the methodology for measuring carbon emissions from procurement processes. As well as recognising the need for the committee to scrutinise the conclusions of a review of the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan before the Cabinet considers it.
Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Progress Report	The Committee's role to scrutinise the Public Services Board's work	To ensure that the Board's delivery arrangements lead to realising the well-being objectives, highlight the need for future reports to include information/data on progress in delivery.

Introduction of public electric vehicle charging points	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd	Recommend that there should be a minimum of two charging points at each site. Identify the need to receive an update including the Business Plan and information about the provision in rural areas of Gwynedd.
Public Toilets	Pre-decision Scrutiny / Follow-up following scrutiny at the 5 October 2023 meeting	Scrutinise progress in delivering the strategy.
Grass-cutting and Maintenance of County Road Verges	A follow-up to the scrutiny at the 22 February 2024 meeting	To support the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department's intention to extend the cut and collect trials to the Arfon area.

Care Scrutiny Committee

Adults, Health and Well-being Department, Children and Supporting Families Department, Health, and the Housing and Property Department

Item	Reason for scrutiny	Impact of Scrutiny
The Council's capacity to implement the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Arrangements	A matter on the risk register	Express genuine concern about the situation and an unwillingness to accept the risk highlighted in the report. Ask the Cabinet Member for Adults to discuss further with the Department and create an action

		plan. To note a wish to receive further information from an expert. (see page 22 for more information)
Annual Report of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel 2023/24	Assurance in terms of corporate safeguarding arrangements	Ensure that the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and robust.
Developing a residential provision for looked after children in a small group	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd	Receive assurance that progress is taking place to achieve the priority project. Highlight the need for further scrutiny following a period of the provision being established.
Domiciliary Care Service	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd	Note concern about the domiciliary care waiting lists in some areas. Request data on waiting lists across the County to enable comparison of areas. The Cabinet Member for Adults was asked to update the Committee on the work of the Domiciliary Care Project to include information on reducing costs and improving data quality.
Dementia provision and transport for those with dementia to attend day care	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd	Express concern that the provision is not consistent across the County and emphasise the importance of giving unpaid carers a break. Request a further report on the Transport Policy review and the Day Care review for members to provide timely input.
Annual Report 2023-24 – Complaints, Enquiries and Acknowledgements Procedure – Children and Supporting Families and Adults, Health and Wellbeing	Assurance in terms of the arrangements for handling complaints in care work	Receive assurance as to the arrangements for dealing with complaints in care work.

Charging for Care Policy	Pre-decision Scrutiny	Agree to the principle of further research to revise the charging for care policy. Request a more detailed report including exact fees to be charged and the charging framework.
A dedicated meeting to scrutinise the social housing field	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Homely Gwynedd	An example of good practice in focusing on one area. A constructive discussion with external partners to ensure effective collaboration to meet the needs of the people of Gwynedd. Request additional information from the Housing and Property Department and for them to discuss with the housing associations in terms of providing a standard form for members to complete on behalf of tenants when maintenance work is required including the provision of different points of contact. Express concern about a lack of input from the Council when house swaps take place; the potential implications of the 'White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales' for the Housing Allocations Policy; the lack of a reduction in the numbers on the Common Housing Register over the last ten years; and the number of homeless people in the County.
Care Inspectorate Wales and Wales Audit Joint Inspection – October 2024	Assurance that action is being taken on the findings of the audit	A discussion with external auditors about their findings and recommendations. Scrutinise the work programmes and identify the need to receive progress reports to ensure action is being taken.

Health – an opportunity to discuss various concerns with representatives from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	Concern in the community and the effect on residents	A constructive discussion with the Health Board, highlighting issues that arise in our communities.
Housing Action Plan	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Homely Gwynedd	Ensure there is progress on realising this priority project in the Council Plan. To ask the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property to revisit the Tŷ Gwynedd scheme to consider whether it provides value for money and whether the money should be invested in another project within the Housing Action Plan.
Gwynedd Mental Health Service	Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd	Scrutinise its operation following remodelling of the service.
Progress Report on the Autism Team's Work Programme	Recommendation deriving from the work of a Task and Finish Group / Council Plan 2023-28 - A Caring Gwynedd	Encourage the Cabinet Members to write to the Welsh Government enquiring about permanent funding for the Autism Team.

Scrutiny Investigation

Following the scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements in schools at the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee meeting on 18 July 2024, the need to examine the area in greater detail was identified.

A brief for the Scrutiny Investigation into Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools was adopted on 13 February 2025.

The main question that the investigation addresses is:

'Are safeguarding arrangements in the county's schools appropriate and implemented consistently?'

A series of four meetings were held at the start of the investigation to understand legal requirements and consider good practice in the field of safeguarding in schools. The work of the investigation is ongoing. We will report further on the investigation's work in the next annual report after submitting the draft report of the scrutiny investigation to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

Developments in 2024-25

INFORMAL MEETINGS

TO IMPROVE THE FOCUS AND IMPACT OF THE INFORMAL MEETINGS – TRIAL ONLINE, HOUR-LONG MEETINGS, APPROXIMATELY 5 WEEKS BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING.

Focus on questions

- An opportunity to refine the questions submitted to the workshops.
- The questions will form the basis of the report to the committee.
- New scrutiny report template to support this.
- Local questions – An opportunity to ask if there are local issues, which, when combined, raise a theme and a strategic question to be added as a question to be answered in the report.

Assessment of the Performance / Impact of Scrutiny

- To assess the impact of scrutiny, scoring every item on the dart board.
- Self-evaluate the committee's operation and learn as we go along.

Report back

- Representatives at performance challenge meetings/scrutiny groups/forums/boards to report back.

BRIEFING MEETINGS

PRE-COMMITTEE BRIEFINGS TO BEGIN AT 10 O'CLOCK AND FOCUS ON THE QUESTIONING STRATEGY

Questioning Strategy

- Sufficient time to go through the questioning strategy item-by-item and identify who is asking what.
- Check if all the different elements that need scrutiny have been identified.
- An opportunity to ask if there are local issues, which, when combined, raise a theme and a strategic question to ask in committee.

COMMITTEE

INSIGHTFUL QUESTIONING BEFORE REACHING A DECISION ON WHETHER THE COMMITTEE IS SATISFIED OR WHETHER IT NEEDS TO MAKE SMART RECOMMENDATIONS

Presentations

- Establish a procedure whereby a Cabinet Member or Head of Department has ONLY 5 MINUTES to present an item at the Committee (as everyone has prepared and read in advance).
- No passing of the baton to officers afterwards, officers to answer questions only.
- The Chair to open the discussion i.e. move on to questions following 5 minutes.

Focus item-by-item

- The briefing meetings will enable the committee to focus on questions.
- Members should not give opinions, comments or repeat – a role for individual Members and the Chair.
- Try to allocate specific time for an item and adhere to that.

Recommendations

- Decide if comfortable with the direction or if a specific recommendation is needed.

Challenging Performance

Representatives of the scrutiny committees attended performance-challenging meetings during 2024/25. The arrangements will change in 2025/26 with the system of scrutiny representatives attending performance challenge meetings coming to an end. Performance reports will be submitted for public scrutiny twice-yearly at scrutiny committee meetings from June 2025 onwards. The aim is to improve transparency by replacing the procedure of performance reports being submitted to the Cabinet.

Tracking Arrangements

The Scrutiny Forum considered establishing a formal tracking procedure and concluded that the information should be shared with the scrutiny members every 6 months. An update on decisions / recommendations since May 2022 was shared with the members in December 2024.

See below for an example of the impact of scrutiny resulting from the tracking work:

"In June 2024, I submitted a report to the Care Scrutiny Committee to share the risk that Cyngor Gwynedd faces in relation to our Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) situation.

There was an unanimous decision that the Members were not willing to accept the risk to the Council and a request was made to re-examine the situation and find a solution.

I am pleased to report that a successful bid has been submitted to employ 2 Best Interest Assessors on a permanent basis. These roles, along with the annual grant from the Welsh Government, will help us tackle the waiting list and ensure that the risks to the Council are significantly reduced.

I would like to thank the Members for their support and I will be happy to provide a further update once the additional posts have had an impact."

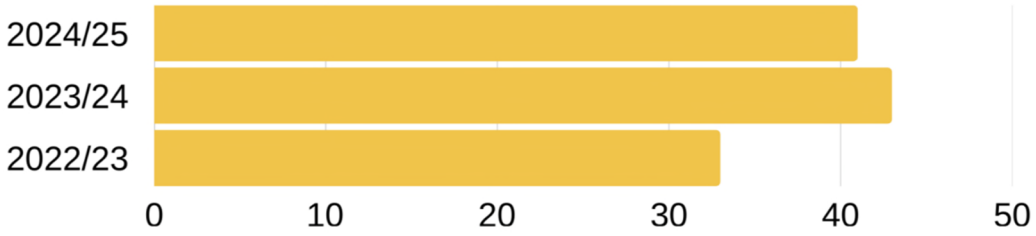
Assistant Head - Safeguarding, Quality Control, Mental Health and Community Safety

All information about the scrutiny work in 2024-25 is available in the full version of the Annual Report on the Council's website –

https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/scrutiny

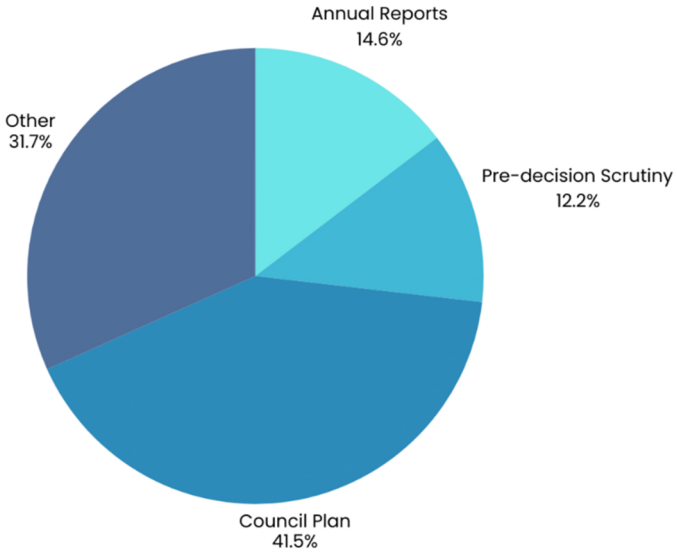
Facts about Scrutiny in Gwynedd in 2024/25

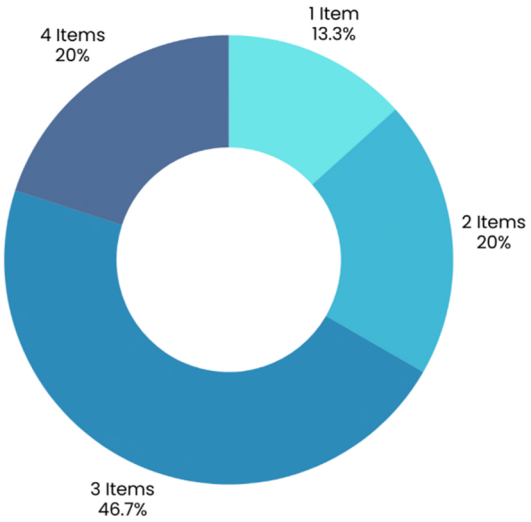
41 items were scrutinised at formal meetings (43 last year, 33 the year before)



45 members (out of a possible 59) have been involved in undertaking the important scrutiny work during the year

Reason for Scrutiny – Percentages



Number of Scrutiny Forum meetings held during the year

Number of items scrutinised at a meeting