Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25

CONTRIBUTE TO DRIVING IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES FOR THE PEOPLE OF GWYNEDD

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.

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CYNGOR GWYNEDD

Foreword

Last year we reported on the actions being taken in response to a review of our scrutiny arrangements by Audit Wales. We are continuing to refine our scrutiny arrangements and are building on the steps that have been taken in response to the review's recommendations. It is an ongoing journey, and I and my co-chairs and vice-chairs, have worked together through the Scrutiny Forum to ensure that we identify any opportunities to improve our arrangements in order to maximise the value of scrutiny's contribution to driving improvement in services for the people of Gwynedd.

All members, Cabinet Members, Heads of Department and residents of Gwynedd were given the opportunity to propose potential items to be scrutinised during 2024/25. Two suggestions of possible matters to be scrutinised were received from the residents of Gwynedd.

The Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee recognised the need to conduct a scrutiny investigation into safeguarding arrangements in schools. The Communities Scrutiny Committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny on the proposal to introduce an Article 4 Direction to manage the change of use of second homes and holiday lets before the Cabinet approved its implementation. The Care Scrutiny Committee invited external partners on three occasions. A meeting was held to scrutinise the social housing field only, and representatives from the housing associations were invited; external auditors came to report on their work in the adults field; and representatives from the Health Board were invited to discuss health issues.

This report provides a summary of the scrutiny work carried out during the year, highlighting the impact of the scrutiny.

Working together is paramount to achieving and driving service improvement. I appreciate the contribution of my fellow chairs and vice-chairs, the scrutiny members, cabinet members, officers and everyone who has contributed to the scrutiny work during the year. I cannot over-emphasise that working together constructively is essential to ensure the success of scrutiny.

Councillor Beth Lawton,
Chair of the Scrutiny Forum

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Scrutiny Workshops

Workshops to produce a draft work programme for 2024/25 for each Scrutiny Committee were held in April 2024.

The opportunity was taken to remind members of the purpose of scrutiny in Gwynedd, namely:

CONTRIBUTE TO DRIVING IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES FOR THE PEOPLE OF GWYNEDD

This is done constructively by:

- Investigating concerns regarding the quality of our services
- Acting as a Critical Friend, ensuring that appropriate attention is given to the citizen's voice
- Identifying good practice and weaknesses
- Holding the Cabinet and its members to account
- Reviewing or scrutinising decisions or actions that are not the responsibility of the Cabinet

It was highlighted that the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 requires councils to consider the impact of doing something now and the long-term effect for the future. It was elaborated that scrutiny does this by working in partnership, making effective use of time in committees, by questioning and making achievable recommendations.

The importance of the impact of scrutiny and the need to make SMART recommendations were emphasized.

S pecific
M easurable
A chievable
R elevant
T ime bound

The different types of scrutiny – reactive and proactive – were detailed:

REACTIVE *Hold to Account*	**PROACTIVE** *Support Improvement*
Consult and make recommendations through: • Committees; • Investigations; • Task and Finish Groups.	• Monitoring • Challenging • Seek assurance for: ➢ performance; ➢ decisions to come; ➢ decisions made; ➢ policies.

The practical changes to scrutiny arrangements were outlined following the Audit Wales review of scrutiny efficiency and the 'Scrutiny Committees Best Practice' training conducted by external trainers in March 2024.

Potential items for scrutiny during the year were considered. The committee members had received a list of possible items for the areas of work for which the individual committees are responsible, in advance. Members were asked to respond to an on-line question ahead of the workshop – ***What are your 5 main priorities?*** – keeping in mind the following factors:

- 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?

The top items from the responses to the question were noted. The members were given an opportunity to discuss:

Do you agree with the 5 main priorities?

What else from the list should be scrutinised during 2024/25?

Open discussions were held and an initial version of the draft work programme was produced. The aim was to prioritise a maximum of three items per meeting to ensure that the items were addressed properly. Following the discussions, the relevant Heads of Department and Cabinet Members joined. They were given the opportunity to identify any issues that needed consideration in the context of the matters prioritised and in terms of the timing of the scrutiny.

Each committee had a draft work programme formed at the end of the workshops.

Scrutiny Forum

The Scrutiny Forum meets regularly to take an overview of all the Council's scrutiny work, with the members (Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees) challenging each other to ensure that the right issues are prioritised.

A meeting of the Forum with the 2023/24 chairs and vice-chairs was held on 7 May 2024. The membership at the time was:

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	CHAIR	VICE-CHAIR
Education and Economy	Cllr Elwyn Jones	Vacant Seat
Communities	Cllr Elin Hywel	Cllr Annwen Hughes
Care	Cllr Beth Lawton	Cllr Linda Ann Jones

The members considered the draft scrutiny forward programme before the individual scrutiny committees adopted their work programme. Forum members were given the opportunity to express their views on the proposed changes to the committees' practical operating arrangements in 2024/25. What was planned to be included in the 2023/24 annual report was presented, and members were asked for suggestions on its content.

At the first meeting of the Forum on 25 October 2024 with the new membership, the role of the Scrutiny Forum was clarified, namely 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 fulfil 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.

The chairs and vice-chairs per committee for 2024/25 are:

Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

Councillor
Cai Larsen

Councillor
Rhys Tudur

Communities Scrutiny Committee

Councillor
Annwen Hughes

Councillor
Delyth Lloyd Griffiths

Care Scrutiny Committee

Councillor
Beth
Lawton

Councillor
Dewi Jones
(until 9 December
2024)

Councillor
Elwyn Jones
(from 20 February
2025)

An overview of the forward scrutiny programme was given to ensure that the right matters had been prioritised. Consideration was also given to the Cabinet forward programme, and whether there were any further issues that should be scrutinised before the Cabinet made a decision.

The forum discussed developments in the area of scrutiny, the procedure for scrutiny chairs to receive an invitation to attend a Cabinet meeting when scrutiny committees have pre-scrutinised an item, the arrangements for tracking decisions/recommendations and the arrangements for reporting on performance to the scrutiny committees rather than reporting to Cabinet meetings.

A meeting of the Forum was held on 29 January 2025, consideration was given to the latest versions of the scrutiny forward programme and the Cabinet forward programme. The Forum considered the draft brief of the Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation. Resources were prioritised to enable the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee to establish a group of committee members to undertake the work. More information about the scrutiny investigation on page 20 of the annual report.

A document was presented which raised awareness among Scrutiny Forum members about the scrutiny arrangements of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), for consideration, before the Full Council at its meeting on 6 March 2025 approved the establishment of a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the North Wales CJC which will have representation from the 6 North Wales councils.

At the Forum's final meeting for the year, the members reflected on the developments to the scrutiny arrangements during 2024/25. What was planned to be included in the 2024/25 annual report was presented, and members were asked for suggestions on its content. Focus was given to the arrangements for producing the 2025/26 scrutiny work programme. Resources were approved to hold a Task and Finish Group – Draft Education Language Policy, on the basis that there were sufficient resources to hold a single meeting of the task group.

Scrutiny Committees

There are three scrutiny committees in Gwynedd, and each has a role to scrutinise specific areas of work. In this section there is information about which areas of work the different committees are responsible for scrutinising, the items scrutinised during 2024-25 in a Committee meeting, the reason for scrutiny and the impact of the scrutiny per item.

Emphasis is placed on scrutiny adding value in Gwynedd with items being prioritised to scrutinise them in a timely way to maximise the impact.

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

1. GwE Annual Report

Annual Item / Assurance

The School Efficiency Service (GwE) Annual Report 2023/24 which reported progress against the five key areas and also set out the next steps on the improvement pathway was scrutinised. This is the last Annual Report that GwE would provide for the scrutiny committee because GwE is ending, with the regional arrangements being replaced by local arrangements.

Impact of Scrutiny – Scrutiny at the end of a period, commenting on what has been achieved.

2. Middle Tier Review – Schools Improvement Service

Input to the future direction

A requirement for all Education Authorities to establish arrangements for supporting schools that meet the requirements of the Schools Improvement Framework as GwE winds down. The latest situation was considered, and the challenges in setting up the arrangements.

Impact of Scrutiny – Early input from the Scrutiny Committee into how the schools improvement service will be provided in future.

3. Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools

Assurance in terms of the arrangements

Safeguarding arrangements in schools were scrutinised, along with the guidance and support provided in this area by the Education Department.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

4. Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan 2035

Council Plan 2023-28 – A Prosperous Gwynedd

The draft plan was scrutinised before it was adopted by the Cabinet on 14 February 2023. This year, progress was scrutinised in the delivery of the Plan, the partnership structure, the action plan and the arrangements for monitoring progress together with the indicators.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

5. Progress report on the response to Estyn recommendations

External Auditor's Report

The report detailed the Education Department's progress in response to the recommendations of the Estyn Report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd (June 2023) in relation to pupil attendance and behaviour in the county's schools.

The actions taken were considered, scrutinising the progress made in improving attendance and behaviour within schools, acting on the findings of the work that has looked at the use of inclusion funding within schools as well as the challenges and opportunities in the area of inclusion.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

6. Transforming education for children in their early years

Council Plan 2023-28 - Gwynedd Yfory

The steps planned to be taken to transform education for children in their early years were scrutinised, taking into account the timetable, the key milestones and the financial situation.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

7. Staff Well-being Strategy

Pre-decision Scrutiny / Scrutiny of staff well-being support

Consideration was given to the draft Strategy which detailed the main objectives of the strategy to realise a vision of working together to improve well-being across all of the Council's workforce, creating the best possible working environment to ensure a healthy, resilient and productive workforce that can work to their full capacity to serve the residents of Gwynedd.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

8. Schools' Revenue Budgets

Impact on Gwynedd schools

The impact of cuts and demographic changes on school budgets, staffing levels, redundancy arrangements, support for schools, the impact on classes and the training available to school staff and governors to deal with the field, were considered.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

9. Education Transport

Overspending in the field

The members scrutinised the reasons for the overspending, the actions that have been taken in response to the situation and the options under consideration in relation to future education transport arrangements in order to seek to rationalise and reduce costs where practicable.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

10. Gwynedd Economy Plan
Pre-decision Scrutiny / Strategic Plan

A report detailing the work to develop a new Economy Plan for Gwynedd was received.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

11. Education Language Policy – The Engagement Procedure and Draft Policy
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Welsh Gwynedd

The Committee elected representatives to attend an engagement session with representatives from the Language Committee to discuss the language education policy in December 2024. The engagement procedure was scrutinised at the Committee meeting on 13 February 2025.

At the meeting of 10 April 2025, the Draft Education Language Policy developed by the Education Department and Meirion Prys Jones (External Consultant) were scrutinised. Consideration was given to the strategic direction of the draft policy and the intention to set an ambition to ensure that children and young people in the county grow into proficient Welsh users and develop bilingual or multilingual skills within the Gwynedd Education System.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

12. Immersion Education System
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Welsh Gwynedd

An update on the evaluation process was scrutinised in the context of the evaluation of the Immersion System. It was reported that a research team from Bangor University was conducting an evaluation of the system and that the conclusions of the evaluation were awaited.

Impact of Scrutiny – Decide to scrutinise the Action Plan for Implementing the Recommendations for Improving the Immersion Education System.

13. Youth Service
Council Plan 2023-28 - Gwynedd Yfory

An opportunity to provide guidance on the future direction of the Youth Service's work and discuss whether it meets the needs of Gwynedd's young people and achieves its objectives following the restructuring in 2018.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

14. Additional Learning Needs in mainstream and Special Schools
Scrutiny of additional learning needs (ALN) education provision

The provision was scrutinised, taking into account the progress made to ensure compliance with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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 Committee

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

15. Article 4 Direction – Public Consultation
Pre-decision Scrutiny / Council Plan 2023-28 – A Homely Gwynedd

Consideration was given to the intention to introduce an Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights related to changing the use of a residential dwelling (C3 use) into holiday use, whether to be used as a second home (C5 use), short-term holiday let (C6 use) or mixed use. Representations received during the public engagement period and the Council's response to the comments were scrutinised.

Impact of Scrutiny – Thorough pre-scrutiny to ensure that adequate consideration has been given to various factors. Recommend to the Cabinet that the direction be confirmed.

16. Ash Die-back Disease
A matter on the risk register

The programme of work for examining and treating ash die-back disease was scrutinised. Consideration was given to issues including trees on private land, the use of technology, the removal of felled trees, the possibility of establishing a one-stop shop and a review of the Tree Management Policy.

Impact of Scrutiny – Receive assurance that progress is being made to mitigate the risk.

17. Parking Fees
Pre-decision Scrutiny

Consideration was given to the financial context and the possible options in terms of charging parking fees in general and the idea of an inflation-based annual increase.

Impact of 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.

18. Developments in the Public Transport field
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd

The area of public transport has been prioritised in the Council Plan 2023-28. It sets out a clear vision of "reviewing our existing public transport provision with the aim of developing a public transport network that will be convenient, reliable and reasonably priced to allow the residents of Gwynedd to travel conveniently every day of the week".

The cross-county review of the bus network was scrutinised, taking into account regional and national developments and the impact of these developments on Gwynedd.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

19. Waste Collection and Recycling Services
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd

Scrutiny of the progress made with the work programme to ensure that the waste and recycling field offers efficient, high-quality and safe services, and continues to meet the Welsh Government's ambitious recycling targets over the coming years. The barriers and opportunities to achieving as well as the latest situation in terms of overspending was addressed.

Impact of Scrutiny – Ensure there is progress on realising this priority project in the Council Plan.

20. Dog Control Orders
Assurance in terms of implementation

The implementation of the orders, the number of fixed penalties given to owners and the work to highlight the responsibilities of dog owners were considered.

Impact of Scrutiny – Recommend that the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department contacts Councillors to offer a supply of dog waste bags for use in their communities.

21. Planning and Welsh-speaking Communities
Assurance in terms of implementation

Identified the need for assurance that the planning system considers seriously the impact of (major and minor) developments on vulnerable Welsh-speaking communities. The statutory context and the national and local planning policy context were considered.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

22. Annual Update by the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership
The Committee's role as a Crime and Disorder Committee

An overview of the activities of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership for the period 2024/25 was considered.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

23. Climate and Nature Emergency Plan: Annual Report 2023/24
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd

The Annual Report which reported on progress in implementing the Plan was pre-scrutinised.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

24. Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Progress Report
The Committee's role to scrutinise the Public Services Board's work

The Board's delivery arrangements for 2024-25 were scrutinised based on the Gwynedd and Anglesey 2023-28 Well-being Plan.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

25. Introduction of public electric vehicle charging points
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd

The Council is developing a network of over a hundred electric vehicle charging points across Gwynedd. The work achieved to date in developing a charging points network, and what is planned over the next period was scrutinised.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

26. Public Toilets
Pre-decision Scrutiny / Follow-up following scrutiny at the 5 October 2023 meeting

The members scrutinised an update on the implementation of the Public Toilets Strategy which included the action plan, the sources of funding to improve the provision, the latest timetable for the introduction of contactless payment technology and the income situation.

Impact of Scrutiny – Scrutinise progress in delivering the strategy.

27. Grass-cutting and Maintenance of County Road Verges
A follow-up to the scrutiny at the 22 February 2024 meeting

Local authorities have statutory duties to maintain and enhance biodiversity. An update on the arrangements for managing roadsides was presented, including information on the rural grass-cutting contract and the cut and collect trials to promote wildlife and biodiversity needs.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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

28. Council's capacity to implement the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Arrangements
A matter on the risk register

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) is the legal procedure where an individual must be deprived of their freedom when they do not have the capacity to consent to their care and treatment to keep them safe from harm. The ongoing challenge to comply with statutory duties relating to DoLS puts the Council at risk of being penalised financially.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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*)

29. Annual Report of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel 2023/24
Assurance in terms of corporate safeguarding arrangements

The Safeguarding Strategic Panel has been set up to look at safeguarding as a corporate, cross-departmental matter. The panel's work during 2023/24 was scrutinised.

Impact of Scrutiny – Ensure that the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and robust.

30. Developing a residential provision for looked after children in a small group
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd

The priority project is intended to improve the experiences of children with intense and complex needs who are looked after by the Council and currently must leave the county or Wales to obtain a suitable provision. The aim of the scheme is to replace the need to outsource with the provision being supplied by the Council, managing to provide residential care for looked-after children for a substantially lower cost than the current average costs.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

31. Domiciliary Care Service
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd

The effectiveness of the domiciliary care provision across the county was scrutinised, with particular focus on maintaining and improving the service for residents.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

32. Dementia provision and transport for those with dementia to attend day care
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd

Concern from some members that there is no transport available for people living with Dementia to attend daycare and that this leads to isolation, lack of socialisation and a lack of respite for unpaid carers/family. The current daycare provision, the support available to individuals living with dementia, the barriers and considerations, and the next steps were scrutinised.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

***33.* Annual Report 2023-24 – Complaints, Enquiries and Acknowledgements Procedure – Children and Supporting Families and Adults, Health and Wellbeing**
Assurance in terms of arrangements for handling complaints in care work

The Annual Report on the implementation of the Representations and Complaints Procedure was scrutinised, considering the arrangements for dealing effectively with complaints received from service users and their representatives.

Impact of Scrutiny – Receive assurance as to the arrangements for dealing with complaints in care work.

34. Charging for Care Policy
Pre-decision Scrutiny

The intention to revise the charging for care policy to give the Council the right to charge fees for some care and support services where no fee has historically been charged, was scrutinised. The recommendation to revise the policy and to consult on it was scrutinised, before a decision by the Cabinet.

Impact of 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.

35. A dedicated meeting to scrutinise the social housing field
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Homely Gwynedd

Members had identified the need to have a meeting to focus on the social housing area. Responses to questions provided in advance to the Housing and Property Department and the housing associations operating in Gwynedd were received. Representatives from Adra, Clwyd Alyn, Grŵp Cynefin and North Wales Housing attended.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

36. Care Inspectorate Wales and Wales Audit Joint Inspection – October 2024
Assurance that action is being taken on the findings of the audit

A letter from Care Inspectorate Wales 'Improvement Check Visit to Cyngor Gwynedd – Adult Services' and the Audit Wales report 'Domiciliary Care – Cyngor Gwynedd' were addressed along with the work programmes for responding to their recommendations.

Impact of Scrutiny - 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.

***37.* Health – an opportunity to discuss various concerns with representatives from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**
Concern in the community and the effect on residents

Responses were received from Health Board representatives to questions that had been provided in advance. Members were given the opportunity to ask further questions. During the discussion, issues such as the vision of the Health Board, doctors and other daily services, centralisation of services, vascular service, mental health and intermediate preventive services were discussed.

Impact of Scrutiny – A constructive discussion with the Health Board, highlighting issues that arise in our communities.

38. Housing Action Plan
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Homely Gwynedd

The aim of the Housing Action Plan is to "Ensure that the people of Gwynedd have access to a suitable home of a high standard, that is affordable and improves their quality of life." The progress of the Plan's main projects and next steps was scrutinised.

Impact of Scrutiny – 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.

39. Gwynedd Mental Health Service
Council Plan 2023-28 – A Caring Gwynedd

The Council's direction in this area of work was scrutinised, following the first phase of a review of the service and plans to establish a new working model in 2023/24. A progress report on the new work model was received.

Impact of Scrutiny – Scrutinise its operation following remodelling of the service.

40. 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

A progress report on the Autism Team's work programme was received. Details were provided on access to information and advice about the services available; support; workforce/training issues, partnership working and the financial situation.

Impact of Scrutiny - Encourage the Cabinet Members to write to the Welsh Government enquiring about permanent funding for the Autism Team.

The agendas and minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meetings can be viewed under this link – **https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/scrutiny**

Scrutiny Investigation

Following the Scrutiny Forum's approval to prioritise resources, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee adopted a brief for the **Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation** on 13 February 2025.

The members who have been undertaking the work of the investigation are:

- Councillors Dawn Lynne Jones, Cai Larsen, Gwynfor Owen and Richard Glyn Roberts
- Co-opted Member - Sharon Roberts (Parent/Governor Representative for Arfon)

The main question that the investigation addresses is:

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

Councillor Cai Larsen was elected Chair of the investigation at the first meeting.

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 key questions addressed were:

- What are the requirements including guidance in circulars and guidance on 'safeguarding requirements' in schools?
- What are the safeguarding arrangements for schools in Gwynedd?
- How does the collaboration between schools/the Education Department and the Children's Department work?
- What are the findings/views of Estyn (the regulators in the field) on arrangements in Gwynedd schools?
- Are there examples of good practice nationally, and what would top-quality safeguarding arrangements look like in schools? (i.e. how good arrangements can be ensured)
- What do the schools say about their safeguarding arrangements and the support from the authority - are there specific themes?

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

In the 2023/24 annual report, we noted the intention to introduce changes to our practical arrangements during 2024/25 following a review of our arrangements by Audit Wales and the 'Scrutiny Committees Best Practice' training delivered by external trainers.

The Scrutiny Forum and scrutiny officers worked together to develop practical changes to our scrutiny arrangements to make more effective use of time at scrutiny committee meetings.

Here are details of the different elements that together attempt to further strengthen our arrangements with the aim of ensuring effective scrutiny.

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.

Tracking Arrangements

One of the recommendations arising from Audit Wales's review into the efficiency of our scrutiny arrangements was:

"The process of reporting on the decisions of scrutiny committees should be strengthened and a formal tracking arrangement should be adopted, in order to get the best value for money and highlight publicly the contribution of the scrutiny system to the Council's governance arrangements."

Informal arrangements to track scrutiny recommendations already existed. 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

Challenging Performance

Performance challenge meetings are held every other month (except for April and August), in accordance with the Council departments' areas of work.

In 2024/25, representatives of the scrutiny committees were invited to two meetings, to:

- Have a taste of what grasp the individual departments have of performance matters.
- Identify, if required, any performance issues that may merit being addressed by a formal scrutiny committee in due course.

The members who attended performance challenge meetings during 2024/25 were:

Education	Economy	Corporate Services and Legal	Finance
Beth Lawton Gwynfor Owen reserve Jina Gwyrfai	Iwan Huws Dewi Owen reserve Jina Gwyrfai	Cai Larsen Huw Rowlands	Cai Larsen Beth Lawton

Environment	Highways, Engineering and YGC
Llio Elenid Owen (until 9 December 2024) Rhys Tudur (until 5 December 2024)	Stephen Churchman a Rob Triggs reserve - Arwyn Roberts

Adults, Health and Well-being	Children and Supporting Families	Housing and Property
Meryl Roberts Einir Wyn Williams	Gwynfor Owen Einir Wyn Williams	Menna Baines Dewi Jones (until 9 December 2024)

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.

Training

As already reported, at the start of the scrutiny workshops, training was held for members of the scrutiny committees on matters to be considered when prioritising which included:

THE PURPOSE OF SCRUTINY **WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS **REACTIVE SCRUTINY**

RECEIVE ASSURANCE AND/OR MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS

SMART RECOMMENDATIONS **PROACTIVE SCRUTINY**

CONSIDER THE BEST METHOD OF SCRUTINY **IMPACT OF SCRUTINY**

Training for prospective chairs and vice-chairs was held in May 2024. The training detailed the legal aspects, the role of chairs and practical issues in chairing committee meetings.

Reference was made to the standard items on committee agendas – apologies, declaration of personal interest, urgent matters, minutes (for accuracy only). The training elaborated on the procedure for making decisions including how to deal with an amendment to a proposal. It emphasised the need to ensure there is a quorum (at least a quarter of the committee members who have a vote in attendance) throughout the meeting for the meeting to continue.

It detailed what makes a good Chair:

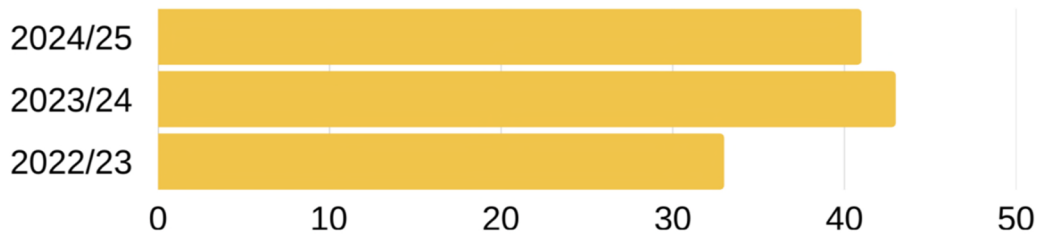
- Prepare thoroughly
- Discuss the support of the vice-chair and relevant officers in advance
- Attend the committee room when a meeting is a multi-location meeting if possible
- Set the stage – welcome, present, explain to the public, stick to the agenda, be clear
- Act professionally

It was noted that the Vice-chair needs to be prepared to step in to chair a meeting at any time. And so, they need to prepare in the same way as the chair. It was suggested that they use their time as vice-chair to consider how they would respond and manage the meeting in each situation.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the need to hold training for scrutiny members on scrutinising performance has been identified and this training will be provided in advance of the first committee meetings.

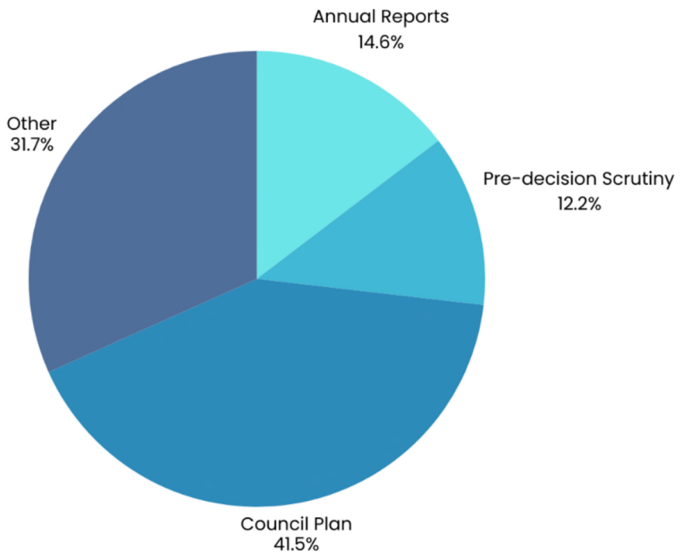
Facts about Scrutiny in Gwynedd in 2024/25

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



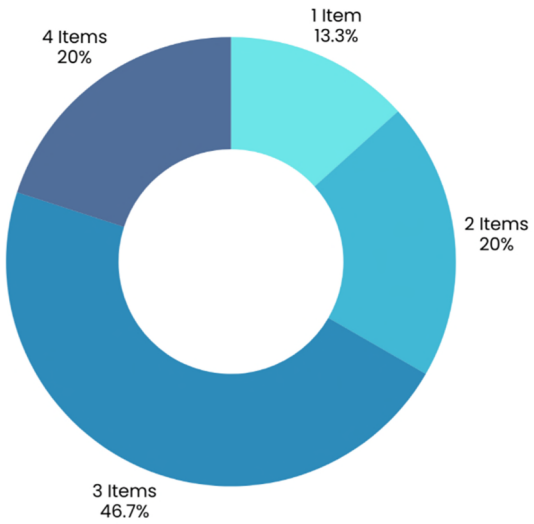
45 members (out of a possible 59) have been involved in undertaking the important scrutiny work during the year

Reason for Scrutiny – Percentages



Number of Scrutiny Forum meetings held during the year

Number of items scrutinised at a meeting



Scrutiny Work Programme 2024-25

EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date	Items	Reason for scrutiny
18/07/24	• GwE Annual Report	Annual Item / Assurance
	• Middle Tier Review - Schools Improvement Service	Input to the future direction
	• Safeguarding Arrangements in schools	Assurance in terms of the arrangements
	• Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan 2035	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Prosperous Gwynedd
17/10/24	• Progress report on response to Estyn recommendations	External Auditor's Report
	• Transform education for children in their early years	Council Plan 2023-28 – Gwynedd Yfory
	• Staff Well-being Strategy	Pre-decision scrutiny / Scrutiny of staff well-being support
12/12/24	• Schools' Revenue Budgets	Impact on Gwynedd Schools
	• Education Transport	Overspending in the field
13/02/25	• Gwynedd Economy Plan	Pre-decision scrutiny / Strategic Plan
	• Education Language Policy – The Engagement Procedure	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Welsh Gwynedd
	• Immersion Education System	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Welsh Gwynedd
	• Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools Scrutiny Investigation Brief	Scrutiny Investigation
10/04/25	• Youth Service	Council Plan 2023-28 – Gwynedd Yfory
	• Additional Learning Needs in mainstream and special schools	Scrutiny of additional learning needs education provision
	• Education Language Policy	Pre-decision scrutiny / Council Plan 2023-28 - A Welsh Gwynedd

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date	Items	Reason for scrutiny
16/05/24	• Article 4 Direction – Public Consultation	Pre-decision Scrutiny / Council Plan 2023-28 - A Homely Gwynedd
	• Ash Dieback Disease	A matter on the risk register
12/09/24	• Parking Fees	Pre-decision Scrutiny
	• Developments in the Public Transport field	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Green Gwynedd
	• Waste Collection and Recycling Services	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Green Gwynedd
	• Dog Control Orders	Assurance in terms of implementation
07/11/24	• Planning and Welsh-speaking Communities	Assurance in terms of implementation
23/01/25	• Annual Update by the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership	The Committee's role as a Crime and Disorder Committee
	• Climate and Nature Emergency Plan: Annual Report 2023/24	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Green Gwynedd
	• Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Progress Report	The Committee's role to scrutinise the Public Services Board's work
20/03/25	• Introduction of public electric vehicle charging points	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Green Gwynedd
	• Public Toilets	Pre-decision Scrutiny / Follow-up following scrutiny at the 5 October 2023 meeting
	• Grass Cutting and Maintenance of County Road Verges	A follow-up to the scrutiny at the 22 February 2024 meeting

CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date	Items	Reason for scrutiny
13/06/24	• The Council's capacity to implement the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Arrangements • Annual Report of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel 2023/24 • Developing a residential provision for looked after children in a small group	A matter on the risk register Assurance in terms of corporate safeguarding arrangements Council Plan 2023-28 - A Caring Gwynedd
26/09/24	• Domiciliary Care Service • Dementia provision and transport for those with dementia to attend day care • Annual Report 2023-24 – Complaints, Enquiries and Acknowledgements Procedure – Children and Supporting Families and Adults, Health and Wellbeing • Charging for Care Policy	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Caring Gwynedd Council Plan 2023-28 - A Caring Gwynedd Assurance in terms of the arrangements for handling complaints in care work Pre-decision Scrutiny
21/11/24	• A dedicated meeting to scrutinise the social housing field	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Homely Gwynedd
20/02/25	• Care Inspectorate Wales and Wales Audit Joint Inspection – October 2024 • Health – an opportunity to discuss various concerns with representatives from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	Assurance that action is being taken on the findings of the audit Concern in the community and the impact on residents
03/04/25	• Housing Action Plan • Gwynedd Mental Health Service • Progress Report on the Autism Team's Work Programme	Council Plan 2023-28 - A Homely Gwynedd Council Plan 2023-28 - A Caring Gwynedd Recommendation deriving from the work of a Task and Finish Group / Council Plan 2023-28 - A Caring Gwynedd