

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20 December 2018

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair)

Councillors:

L.R. Bowen, K.V. Broom, I.W. Davies, J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, S. Najmi, E.M.J.G. Schiavone, B. Thomas, E.G. Thomas, W.T. Evans (In place of D.T. Williams), Jones and Davies

Mr J Davies – Parent Governor (Llanelli Area)
Mrs M. Jones – Parent Governor [Dinefwr Area]
Mrs V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative
Mrs J. Voyle-Williams – Church in Wales Representative

Also in attendance:

Councillor G. Davies, Executive Board Member for Education & Children

The following Officers were in attendance:

Mr G. Morgans	-	Director of Education & Children
Mr Chris Moore	-	Director of Corporate Services
Mr A. Morgan	-	Head of Education Services
Mr A. Rees	-	Head of Curriculum & Wellbeing
Mr S. Davies	-	Head of Access to Education
Ms E. Forsyth	-	Interim Head of School Effectiveness
Mr A. Carter	-	Senior Manager, TIC Schools
Mr J. Buck	-	Performance and Information Officer
Ms S. Nolan	-	Group Accountant
Ms G. Adams	-	Principal Manager, Youth Support Service
Mrs M. Evans Thomas	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer
Mrs L. Jenkins	-	Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP. 10:00 – 12:55

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for were received from Councillor D.T. Williams and from Mrs G. Cornock-Evans (Parent Governor Member - Carmarthen).

In noting that this was the last meeting Mrs Jean Voyle-Williams would be attending in her capacity as the Church in Wales Representative, the Chair thanked Mrs Voyle-Williams for her service and wished her well in the future. Mrs Voyle-Williams thanked the Chair, Committee and officers for their hard work in scrutinising such an important area of work that benefits children and education in the County.

1. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM.

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
L. Bowen	4, 5, 6 and 7	His mother works in Llangunnor School and his fiancée works in the Translation Unit
B.W. Jones	4, 5, 6 and 7	Her son teaches at Ysgol Parc-y-Tywyn
D. Jones	4 and 5	Her sister and brother-in-law work in the Education Department
D. Jones	4, 5, 6 and 7	Her sons are members of the Carmarthenshire Music Service
G. Jones	4 and 5	His wife works in the Education Department
V. Kenny	4 and 5	Her daughter works in Social Services
E. Schiavone	4, 5, 6 and 7	His wife works in Q.E. High School

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

1. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no questions had been received.

1. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2019/20 TO 2021/22

[NOTE: Councillors L. Bowen, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G. Jones, E. Schiavone and Mrs V. Kenny had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Executive Board at its meeting on 19th November 2018 considered the Revenue Budget Strategy 2019/20 to 2021/22 and endorsed the report for consultation purposes.

The Director of Corporate Services provided members with an overview of the Revenue Budget for 2019/20 and indicative figures for the following two years. Members were advised that there was a possibility of a negative settlement, with a 0.5% negative settlement relating to £1.1 million in real terms. In anticipation of the settlement reductions, significant work has been undertaken to identify further service efficiencies/rationalisation.

The Draft Budget takes in to account the effect of the increase in Teachers Pensions Employers Contributions from 16.48% to 23.6%, a cost of £2.75m in 2019/20 and £1.75 in 2020/21. It is likely that this will be funded by a grant from the Welsh Government via Central Government.

A grant of £15m has been made available by the Welsh Government to Local Authorities and it is projected that the share for Carmarthenshire is in the region of £900k, however it has been stipulated that at present the grant must be used for professional training. It is not known whether this may change.

Budget pressures around the Education and Children's Services are due in the main to school based Early Voluntary Redundancies, Special Educational Needs provision, a shortfall in the Music Service SLA income and Out of County Placements. Overall, the Authority is forecasting a variance of £2.237m at the year-end that will have to be met from General Balances.

The Director of Corporate Services summed up by advising that in previous years school budgets had been semi-protected and receive 1% above the national payment from the Welsh Government. However recent changes have moved the responsibility to the Authority and schools are being asked to manage their own costs within a cash neutral budget (inc pay rises and general costs such as utilities and services). This is not an ideal situation and the £900k offered for professional training would go a considerable way to covering any budget shortfall in this area.

The Director of Education and Children acknowledged that the department is under increasing pressure financially with a standstill budget and identifying areas for reduction was difficult.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- The Committee expressed concern at the proposed cuts to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) and asked for these to be reconsidered. It was felt that a reduction in this service would result in additional pressure on schools to manage non-attendance and to deal with issues surrounding non-attendance. The Director of Education and Children advised that the EWS provided a statutory service in dealing with non-attendance therefore the provision would have to continue albeit in a different form. The current non-attendance levels set by Welsh Government are 80% but there is consideration being given to increasing this to 85%, which would increase the workload of the EWS. It was also noted that some schools manage their own non-attendance and are keen to continue to do so. The department is looking at different models for the service, in particular the models used in Denbigh and Conwy and a report is being prepared on options for the future of the service which will be presented to Committee in due course.
- Concern was expressed with regard to the position in relation to teachers' pensions and officers were asked if the situation is unique to Carmarthenshire. The Committee was advised that it is not only an all-Wales issue it is in fact a national issue as the money is being held by central government and if the money is not received then a corporate decision would have to be made on how to proceed.
- The Committee also shared concerns about proposed reductions in Education and Child Psychology Services and School Counselling Services and an assurance was sought that these reductions would not have an impact on the amount of time children are allocated. The Director of Education and Children advised the Committee that it was not possible to say with any certainty that there would be no impact, however, the proposals include some efficiencies in costs which were not related to a reduction in staff. He acknowledged that with increasing emphasis on wellbeing and mental health, these proposals may have to be revisited. The contract for the School Counselling Service will be re-tendered in the future and it was hoped that the Authority could procure a better service at a cheaper cost.

- The Committee noted that some schools were holding reserves above the threshold, and members asked for an explanation on what, if any, plans were in place to work with these schools. The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 requires schools to limit their accumulated reserves at year end to £50,000 for Primary Schools and £100,000 for Secondary and Special Schools or 5% of their budget dependant on what is greater. As at 31st March 2018, 18 primary and 6 secondary schools held surpluses in excess of the thresholds above. The Group Accountant advised that the majority of the Primary Schools were over by a few thousand pounds and that small changes, such as recruitment of a higher band teacher would negate this. Two of the Secondary Schools identified have committed the expenditure to capital projects. Members asked that the most recent figures be circulated.
- Clarification was sought on the locally determined funding formula as members highlighted that it appeared to vary across the Authority. The Director of Education and Children advised that the same formula is used for every school, however some factors such as Free Schools Meals, Looked After Children, Special Units (similar to the unit at Ysgol Bro Banw) etc. can have an effect on the formula allocation. The Committee was reminded that a finance workshop has been arranged for members of the Committee on the afternoon of the 24th January 2019 which would include further information on the locally determined formula;

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that

- 4.1 The 2019/20 - 2021/22 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;**
- 4.2 The Charging Digest for the Education and Children Department, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed;**
- 4.3 The Committee's serious concerns regarding any reduction in the Education Welfare Service, Education and Child Psychology Service and the School Counselling Service and the serious implications of any reduction be relayed to the Executive Board;**
- 4.4 That the Committee's request that any additional money identified Identified across the Authority's budget should be vired to the Education Department be relayed to the Executive Board.**

1. EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL PLAN 2018/19 - 2021/22

[NOTE: Councillors L. Bowen, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G. Jones and E. Schiavone and Mrs V. Kenny had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Director of Education and Children gave an overview of the report and in particular drew member's attention to the following items –

- The number of Support Staff in Schools (non-teaching – school based) was at a higher rate than previously with 1800 support staff to 1700 teaching staff
- The priorities for the department for 2019-2023

The following questions/observations were raised on the report –

- The School Holiday Enrichment Programme was originally a two year pilot scheme which was grant funded. Going forward, the Authority will fund the project, however £0.4m is being made available across Wales to fund this type of work.
- Under learning Transformation Service in the Divisional Summary Action Plan it was noted that the department would '*work with partners in the Regional Skills and Learning Partnership to develop greater opportunities for learning and progression routes including FE /HE and employment.*' The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised members that good working relationships have been developed with the Economic Regeneration Department and progress was being made. The financing of the project was still under consideration.
- Members highlighted the importance of the Music Service and commented that it is listed as a major strength within the report, however, it is also listed as a key area for improvement. Reassurance was sought that the Music Service would continue and funding will be found to ensure this. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised the Committee that a report "A Sustainable and Successful Future for the Music Service" is being prepared which outlines various options to safeguard the future of the service. Carmarthenshire is expecting further funding from the Welsh Government in 2019.
- The report referenced the statutory procedures associated with federation with specific reference to rationalisation and members asked whether there was a drive to federate schools. The Modernisation Services Manager explained that the term "rationalisation" refers to the presumption against schools closures and the drive towards federation. He added that there is a statutory process involved in closing a school which each Authority must follow. There are identified schools but the closure of any school is an emotive issue and not undertaken without considerable consultation.
- Measure 11 on the report set out the '*average length of time in days it has taken all children placed for adoption (in quarter (Q4) to progress from date of should be placed for adoption decision, to date of placement for adoption.*' Members noted a significant increase from 625 days in 2016/17 to 2388 days in 2017/18. The Performance and Information Manager advised that this was probably due to a complex case, and added that she would ask the Head of Children Services to provide members with a more detailed response.
- Reference was made to the Mutual Investment Model and in view of the continuing reservations expressed by members, officers were asked if it would be possible to have a presentation on this issue at a future meeting. The Head of Access to Education advised that he would circulate a link to the relevant page of the Welsh Government website which included an update on MIM. The Committee was reminded that there would be further debate on this issue at future meetings when considering reports on the MEP.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Education and Children Departmental Business Plan 2019/20 – 2022 be received.

1. ERW BUSINESS PLAN 2018/19

[NOTE: Councillors L. Bowen, B.W. Jones, D. Jones and E. Schiavone had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

ERW is a legally constituted alliance of six neighbouring Local Authorities (Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, Pembrokeshire and Powys). Its functions align and adhere to the national guidance for school improvement.

The Committee received a presentation on the ERW Business Plan 2018/19 which set out the key objectives, practice and direction of the region's work. The business plan aligns profitably with the Authority's local school improvement agenda, thus ensuring benefits and progress for all of Carmarthenshire's school settings.

The following questions/observations relating to the presentation and report were raised –

- Reference was made to the fact that some Local Authorities have criticised ERW and accused the alliance of diverting money away from the front line. Neath Port Talbot County Council is threatening to pull out of the alliance and officers were asked if they were concerned. The Director of Education and Children acknowledged that there has been but the Authority's experience of ERW was very encouraging. As a relatively new alliance it is still its early stages and there are some tensions between the Councils and ERW but there is a strong focus on overcoming these tensions and finding a way forward. A new management structure is being developed as part of this process.
- It was noted that the Business Plan presented was for 2018/19, which is a period that is almost at an end. The Director of Education and Children advised that this was due to a change in leadership and the requirement to satisfy the Welsh Government in order for funds to be released.
- The Leaders of Learning (LOLs) element of the project has seconded talented staff from local schools. There has been a mixed response to the LOLs with a lack of time to undertake the work required and a mixed reception from head teachers. As a result it is likely that this part of the project would not continue.
- The lack of succession planning with regards to training head teachers was raised as a concern and members asked what steps were being taken to improve the situation. The Director of Education and Children advised that there were opportunities for training but those who successfully completed the training were moving straight to larger schools. There is also an extended leader program to encourage deputy head teachers to move to leadership.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

1. TIC PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOLS UPDATE

[NOTE: Councillors L. Bowen, B.W. Jones, D. Jones and E. Schiavone had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Senior Manager, TIC Schools gave a presentation providing an update on the TIC (Transform, Innovate, Change) Programme – Support for Schools.

The TIC Schools' programme aims to apply TIC principles of collaborative working, reducing waste and sharing good practice to support schools in reducing costs but, at the same time, protecting the quality of front-line service and improving outcomes. It also aims to strengthen relationships between schools and the Local Authority through partnership working.

The following questions/observations relating to the presentation and report were raised –

- Asked if there are any projects involving renewable energy, the Committee was informed that 16 schools have been identified for a refit programme run by the Welsh Government where the loan is repaid from any energy efficiencies made;
- Reference was made to rural schools struggling with the cost of transport to convey children to various activities and officers were asked if they had considered contacting local bus companies to negotiate prices. The Committee was advised that this was something which could potentially be added to the project, however, it was problematic as provision tends to be on a local basis;

RESOLVED

7.1 that the information be noted;

7.2 that the Committee be provided with an updated copy of the savings made to date via the programme.

1. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items. The Committee was advised that the Local Authority Education Services Self Evaluation report would not be completed ahead of the January meeting.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on 24th January 2019, minus the Local Authority Education Services Self Evaluation report, be agreed.

CHAIR