

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th DECEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor J.E. Williams (Chair)

Councillors: D.J.R. Bartlett (Vice Chair), C. Campbell, J.M. Charles, I.W. Davies, W.G. Hopkins, P. Hughes Griffiths, J.D. James, M.J.A. Lewis, D.W.H. Richards, T. Theophilus

Councillor. T. Devichand– Substitute for Councillor J. Williams
Councillor. J. Edmunds – Substitute for Councillor P.E.M. Jones

Mr. S. Pearson – Parent Governor Member
Mrs. V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative
Canon B. Witt – Church in Wales Representative

Also present:

Councillor G.O. Jones – Executive Board Member for Education & Children
Councillor D. Jenkins – Executive Board Member for Resources

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. C. Moore – Director of Corporate Services
Mr. R. Sully – Director of Education & Children
Mr. G. Morgans – Chief Education Officer (CEO)/Head of Education Services
Mr. A. Rees – Head of Learner Programmes
Mr. S. Smith – Head of Children’s Services
Mr. D. Astins – Strategic Development Manager
Mr. M. Morden – Lifelong Learning Networks Manager
Mrs. S. Nolan – Group Accountant
Ms. B. Dolan – Senior Consultant

Venue: Chamber, 3 Spilman Street Carmarthen (10:00am – 11:40am)

1. APOLOGIES AND OTHER MATTERS

Apologies were received from Councillors P.M.E. Jones and J. Williams. The Chair wished both of them speedy recoveries.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett	Item 6	In that he is President of the Carmarthenshire branch of the National Union of Teachers .

3. DECLARATIONS OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE WERE RECEIVED)

None were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee was provided with a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting scheduled for 21st January 2016. The Head of Learner Programmes noted that the 11 – 19 Strategic Review would now be included in 3 – 19 Curriculum and Assessment Review. The Senior Consultant advised that following the agenda despatch, the MEP Biennial Review had been deferred and the MEP proposal (Stage 3) for Copperworks Infants and Lakefield CP Schools had been included as an urgent item.

RESOLVED to note the list of forthcoming items, subject to the amendments above.

6. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2016/17 to 2018/19

Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett declared an interest In that he is President of the Carmarthenshire branch of the National Union of Teachers.

The Committee considered the Revenue Budget Strategy 2016/17 to 2018/19 (Appendix A) which had been endorsed by the Executive Board for consultation purposes at its meeting on 16th November 2015. It was advised that Welsh Government (WG) had announced the provisional settlement on the 9th December and that Carmarthenshire would see a 1% cut in budget rather than the 3.3% on which the Strategy was predicated. WG had included within the settlement £35m to support education and £21m additional support for social care on an all Wales basis. This equated to £2.1m and £1.3m respectively for Carmarthenshire. If this equivalent funding was pass-ported down to the schools budget, this would reduce the £5.5m efficiency savings required on the schools budget in 2016/17. Currently not all specific grants had been notified and there was still a possibility that some may be included in to the final settlement as opposed to being a specific grant.. There had been no indication for the settlement in future years. In summary, the shortfall in efficiency savings identified for 2016/17 might not now be required, however delivery of the £13.6m identified savings was essential.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Clarification was requested in relation to school budgets. The Director of Corporate Services advised that school budgets had been validated to take account of teachers superannuation, changes to national insurance and pay inflation. This amounted to just over £3m. If the £2.1m protection was passed in full to schools, this would reduce the efficiency savings required next year to £3.4m therefore schools would be getting nearer the same level of funding in cash terms.

Concerns were expressed that schools were currently working on plans to make

the savings as originally planned which could involve staff redundancies. It was asked when schools would be given confirmation of their budget position following the provisional settlement. The Director of Education & Children stated that it was difficult as there was no firm information about the level of protection from WG. The Director of Corporate Services added that he had two concerns namely; the detail in relation to the settlement and protection of education which was not yet clear as well as how this Council would act when they were confirmed.

Concerns were expressed that the uncertainty and timing of the final settlement in March just before the Council meeting on the 11th gave Members no time to give the budget due consideration. The Director of Education & Children advised that his department still had to deliver the efficiency savings as identified in the report and it was important for Members to express their views as part of the consultation process. The Director of Corporate Services added that the Council needed to set the budget in February on the basis of the provisional settlement and it was likely that there would only be minor amendments following the final settlement.

It was asked if the teachers' unions were being consulted with in relation to school budgets. The CEO/Head of Education Services advised that teachers' unions were represented on the School Budgets Forum. In response to an additional question regarding potential school staff redundancies resulting from the savings required, he stated that a group of headteachers and school business officers had been considering ways of reducing costs through changes in business and administration. The Group had been collating ideas and looking at measures to protect smaller schools in particular. The Group would be sharing its ideas early in the New Year. The Director of Corporate Services added that the position regarding protection for schools would also be clearer in January.

Clarification was requested regarding the financial implications of the 1% cut for this Council. The Director of Corporate Services stated that this equated to an improved forecast budget of approximately £7.5m which includes the protection for schools and social care totalling £3.4m. However upon the completion and feedback of the budget consultation members would need to consider how the additional funding is to be utilised, taking account of the additional pressures, the protection requirements, consultation feedback, the efficiencies proposed and any specific grant changes.

It was asked whether or not any education grants were at risk. The Director of Education & Children advised that Local Government had been lobbying WG to reduce the number of grants because of the administrative burden. 11 grants had been amalgamated into the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) last year however WG had also reduced the overall total by approximately 14%. Some of the grants that had been confirmed had not been reduced, such as Flying Start, however some had, such as Families First which had been reduced by 11% and would mean cuts in services to support vulnerable families. The Director of Corporate Services added that WG had confirmed 33 out of the 44 specific grants that existed last year in the settlement so far, with an overall reduction of 5%. Potentially 1 or 2 of the remainder could move into the RSG. The Group Accountant stated that the Pupil Deprivation Grant had been confirmed for the next year and WG had indicated that post 16 funding would remain at the same level as this year however there could be a reduction in the overall EIG.

The proposal to reduce the average time for free school breakfasts was referred to

and it was asked if this could be varied dependant on the situation in the school. Johnstown CP School was cited as an example of a school with 200 pupils receiving the free breakfast with a canteen that only caters for 150. The Strategic Development Manager confirmed that this was being looked at on a site by site basis and in terms of demand. It would also be done in agreement with headteachers and school governing bodies.

Further information was requested in relation to the proposal relating to Statements of Special Education Needs. The CEO/Head of Education Services advised that Statements lasted until the individual left secondary school. The proposal was that the funding released would be considered a saving to the department. In response to an additional question, he confirmed that the Authority had been involved in a pilot of an alternative way of working since 2008 and it would be a further 2 years before the new SEN Code of Practice would be confirmed.

Concerns were expressed about the new policy proposal to reduce the scale of specialist provision for out of school hours respite for disabled children and young people. It was felt that there was insufficient detail about the potential impact. The Head of Children's Services clarified that the proposal was to reduce grant funding by £50k next year to 3 organisations in 3 areas of the county. The organisations would have to raise their funds from elsewhere. The one based in Llanelli was a large organisation however there was a real concern that the service might not be there going forward. The Carmarthen Breakthro play scheme was the only playscheme in the county with a hoist and therefore some children with complex physical disabilities would find it difficult to be catered for elsewhere.

RESOLVED:

6.1 That the report be received.

6.2 To request that the Executive Board reconsiders the new policy proposal to reduce the scale of specialist provision for out of school hours Short Breaks/ Respite for Disabled Children & Young People.

6.3 To endorse the Charging Digest for the Education and Children Department.

7. FUTURE PROVISION OF ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION & CHILDREN

The Committee considered the report which provided an update on the current financial position facing the Adult Community Learning (ACL) Service. It was advised that the service was not core funded by the County Council and therefore dependent on Welsh Government (WG) grants to function. Over the past year, the service had experienced a significant reduction in the Welsh Government grants that fund course provision, staff and related buildings. In the absence of alternative funding, the service would not be able to continue to deliver the current range of courses, manage the range of service buildings and employ the related service staff. The Committee was asked to consider and comment on the recommendations in the report within the context of the approximately. £435k funding that should be available in the 2016-2017 financial year.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Concern was expressed about the social impact of ceasing the range of courses currently delivered as well as the impact of relinquishing management and related running costs of the Community Education Centre. The Felinfoel Centre was cited as an old building which was likely to remain empty and attract anti-social behaviour. The importance of Adult Community Learning (ACL) in helping young people who had not gained qualifications through school was also highlighted.

A question was asked about the Llandeilo Community Education Centre. The Head of Learner Programmes advised that this was currently being managed by the Welsh for Adults (WfA) Service. The CEO/Head of Education Services added that part of the funding for WfA covered the running costs to the end of this financial year. As part of the new WfA tendering process for Wales, the Council has applied to be a provider in partnership with Pembrokeshire.

In response to comments about the other Community Education Centres, the Lifelong Learning Networks Manager clarified that the Glanaman Centre would be leased to Cwmaman Town Council under asset transfer arrangements and transitional funding arrangements were being considered. The Pembrey Centre is being run by Pembrey and Burry Port town council and the legal details to transfer the building to the council are currently in hand. Llanelli had more than 40 potential venues for ACL provision. The situation regarding the Carmarthen Centre had changed since writing the report, in light of the need for a secure examinations environment to deliver the accredited basic skills and ESOL provision.

Reference was made to the wide range of premises available across public services and the need for collaboration and co-location of services going forward in light of the budget cuts for all services.

RESOLVED:

7.1 That the report be received.

7.2 To endorse the recommendations relating to the Adult Community Learning Service to the Executive Board.

8. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORTS

The Committee considered the explanation for the non-submission of the Capital Programme Budget Setting 2016/17 to 2018/19 and MEP proposal (Stage 3) for Copperworks Infants and Lakefield CP Schools.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submission be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23rd NOVEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2015, be signed as a correct record.

10. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE EDUCATION & CHILDREN AND SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23rd NOVEMBER 2015

RESOLVED to receive the minutes of the joint Education & Children and Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee held on the 23rd November 2015.

CHAIR

DATE