

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10th OCTOBER 2016

Present: Councillor J.E. Williams (Chair)

Councillors: D.J.R. Bartlett, C.A. Campbell, J.M. Charles, I.W. Davies, W.G. Hopkins, P. Hughes-Griffiths, J.D. James, M.J.A. Lewis, D.W.H. Richards, J. Williams

Mrs. V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Mrs. K. Hill – Parent Governor Member (Dinefwr Area)

Mrs. A. Pickles – Parent Governor Member (Carmarthen Area)

Also in attendance:

Councillor G.O. Jones – Executive Board Member for Education & Children
Councillor L.M. Stephens – Executive Board Member for Human Resources, Efficiencies and Collaboration (for Item 6)

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. R. Sully – Director of Education & Children's Services

Mr. G. Morgans – Chief Education Officer / Head of Education Services

Mr. A. Morgan – Head of School Effectiveness

Mr. A. Rees – Head of Learner Programmes

Mr. D. Astins – Strategic Development Manager

Mr. J. Owen – TIC Programme Manager

Mr. M. Hughes – Democratic Services Officer

Present as an observer:

Mrs. J. Owen – Democratic Services Officer

Venue: County Hall Chamber, Carmarthen (10:05am – 12:15pm)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P.E.M. Jones as well as Mrs. E. Heyes (Parent Governor Member Llanelli Area) and Canon B. Witt (Church in Wales Representative).

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on Monday 21st November 2016, be noted.

6. TIC PROJECT UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the 'Transform, Innovate and Change' (TIC) programme. Members noted that the initiative, established in 2012, was launched in response to the significant financial challenges being faced by the Local Authority and that to date, the TIC approach had assisted in identifying, or was helping to deliver, approximately £6.4m of efficiency savings. The Committee also received an overview of projects relating to services in the Education & Children Department which had led to significant savings in both time and money, as well as leading to more efficient methods of working. The projects were:

- Food orders for school kitchens
- School catering timesheet returns
- Petty cash
- Free school meals service

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the update:

Reference was made to the different contact points within the food orders process for school kitchens (e.g. supplier, Education Department and Financial Services) and whether this could be further rationalised to one point of contact. The Strategic Development Manager noted that partnership working was key to this particular project, especially from the supplier's perspective. As a spin-off from this project, the Department had identified other processes where the number of contact points had been challenged and significantly reduced. In one particular area of work, his team had been removed from the process altogether, enabling the delivery of cashable savings.

In response to a query as to whether schools themselves had realised savings from the food orders, the Strategic Development Manager noted that these were processes related to the work of the Local Authority but that there was significant potential for schools to benefit from employing the TIC methodology to their activities. This was the main reason that the Department would be developing a business case in conjunction with the TIC Team to employ an officer dedicated to working with schools on efficiency projects.

It was asked whether the savings achieved to date were good enough or was the Authority aiming higher and working commercially enough to sort out issues of waste and inefficiency, as would happen in the private sector. The TIC Programme Manager informed the Committee that the approach from the outset had been one of working in partnership and alongside services rather than demanding savings from departments, an approach that would have been a barrier to developing relationships with services. The TIC Programme Team considered the identified savings as a positive outcome although he reminded the Committee that whilst efficiencies were welcomed, the approach had also brought about streamlined and efficient processes and the opportunity for services to invest to save (i.e. to request additional funding / staff in order to gain greater efficiencies in the longer term).

The Committee welcomed the developments and thanked officers for their presentation. The Chair also suggested that the Committee receive further updates on progress relating to the projects considered.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the update be received.

7. ERW BUSINESS PLAN 2016/17

The Committee received a presentation in relation to the work of the ERW (Education through Regional Working) Consortium during 2015/16 and its business plan for 2016-19. The presentation outlined ERW's functions, the continuation of the statutory responsibilities within each local authority as well as the collaborative working across the region. The Committee noted the progress made during the past year and was also updated on the outcomes of the recent ESTYN inspection of the quality of the school improvement services provided by the ERW Consortium, in June 2016. ESTYN had rated four out of five aspects of ERW's work as 'Good' with one listed as 'Adequate'.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report and presentation:

Clarification was sought as to the arrangements for those local authority officers that were seconded to ERW. The Head of School Effectiveness informed the Committee that secondees were funded by ERW through reimbursement to the host local authority which in turn, enabled further commissioning of officers. The central ERW team budget paid for two members of full-time professional staff, including the Managing Director, as well as for four administrative officers. In addition, ERW commissioned and funded a small number of specific posts from Welsh Government grant funding on an annual basis.

Reference was made to a recent report in the media suggesting that ESTYN would not be inspecting local authorities in future. The Head of School Effectiveness stated that there might have been some misunderstanding and that ESTYN would be following up on the recent inspection of the four Welsh school improvement consortia during the current academic year. ESTYN was also currently developing plans for a revised inspection model for local authorities and schools.

It was suggested that the school categorisation process was misunderstood by parents across the ERW region, having been discussed at the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group in September. It was also suggested that the system needed to be effectively communicated to parents. The Head of School Effectiveness acknowledged members' concerns and reminded the Committee that the categorisation process was about the level of support that an individual school received from ERW. There were a number of different factors that influenced what type of support a school might require. He assured the Committee that ERW did everything and anything possible to assist schools with specific difficulties (e.g. no permanent head teacher) and reminded members that for 2015/16, there was not one Carmarthenshire school in the red support category.

It was asked whether there was an alternative method of categorising schools, especially those smaller schools where a single child with special educational needs might significantly impact the overall performance / results of the school. The Head of School Effectiveness acknowledged the comments adding that he sympathised with schools in this situation based on his own experience as a head teacher. He informed the Committee that there was a means of over-riding the system when dealing with small schools in this situation (e.g. those schools with special units). Being able to demonstrate that a school was actually performing better than what its Standards judgement might suggest, was one of the most important discussions that the challenge advisors had with schools during the categorisation process.

In response to a question as to why there was not more pupil progress data available between the different key stages, the Head of School Effectiveness acknowledged that there wasn't enough of this type of data available at present.

In response to further comments regarding the current school categorisation process, the Director of Education & Children acknowledged that these were fundamental issues and that officers had been lobbying the Welsh Government for a very long time but to date, no changes had been forthcoming. He stated that the system of using teacher assessments as part of the process to determine school categorisation was fundamentally flawed and this gave a distorted view of performance to parents. However, officers hoped that as the Donaldson reforms took effect, a new monitoring system would be introduced.

It was asked how exemplary cases of good practice found within Carmarthenshire's schools were shared and promoted. The Head of School Effectiveness informed the Committee that examples of good practice were fully utilised and shared with schools across the region. One example was the ERW 'Celebrating Schools Work' event which allowed schools to share information with other schools, rather than through ERW's officers.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PANEL

The Committee considered an update on the work of the School Improvement Panel which was established in November 2014 to enable the Executive Board Member for Education & Children and the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee to effectively discharge constitutional and statutory responsibilities for

monitoring school performance. The report outlined the 'learning' from the Panel meetings to date and the proposals on how to disseminate the good practice identified.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report and presentation:

It was asked how schools were monitored or actions for schools resulting from Panel meetings were tracked. The Chief Education Officer informed the Committee that the plan was to link the Panel programme with the Committee's main school visit programme in order that the Committee itself could visit a particular school, six months to a year after it had appeared before the Panel. There were more serious cases however, where it was right and proper for a school to be invited back in six months or so in order for the Panel to monitor and consider progress.

It was also asked how schools were selected to appear before the Panel. The Chief Education Officer informed the Committee that there were a number of factors that determined whether a school was invited to a Panel meeting. Firstly, the outcome of a school's recent ESTYN inspection was a key factor, especially if the outcome had been less than favourable. Secondly, officers might suggest specific schools be invited in based on concerns that they might have regarding their performance or governance issues. Thirdly, high performing schools were also invited in so that Panel members might gain an understanding of the reasons for their success and how such good practice could be shared across all the county's schools.

In response to a question, The Chief Education Officer confirmed that four additional members had been added to the Panel's membership and that the list in the report was of the original members of the Panel at its inception.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SCHOOL VISIT ACTIVITY REPORT 2015/16

The Committee considered an activity report on its site visits undertaken during the 2015/16 academic year. A total of 19 schools / children's services facilities had been visited between October 2015 and June 2016.

Councillor P. Hughes-Griffiths requested that it be noted that he was present during the Committee's visits to Tremolet, Llanmiloe and Laugharne Schools on the 24th June 2016.

The Committee **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the Activity Report for 2015/16 be endorsed.

SIGNED: _____ (Chair)

DATE: _____