

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15th MARCH 2017

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, A. James, M.J.A. Lewis, D.W.H. Richards

Mrs. V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative
Mrs. E. Heyes – Parent Governor Member (Llanelli Area)
Mrs. K. Hill – Parent Governor Member (Dinefwr Area)
Mrs. A. Pickles – Parent Governor Member (Carmarthen Area)

Also in attendance:

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

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. G. Morgans – Interim Director of Education & Children's Services
Mr. A. Morgan – Head of School Effectiveness
Mr. S. Smith – Head of Children's Services
Mr. D. Astins – Strategic Development Manager
Mr. S. Davies – Modernisation Programme Manager
Mr. D. Jones – Schools Finance Manager
Mr. M. Hughes – Democratic Services Officer

Venue: County Hall Chamber, Carmarthen (10:00 – 11:35am)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J.D. James and Mrs. J. Voyle Williams (Church in Wales Representative).

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

| Councillor | Minute Item(s) | Nature of Interest |
|------------|----------------|--|
| A. James | Item 7 | He is a governor at Llangadog CP School. |

3. DECLARATIONS OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the item to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on Monday 24th April 2017, be noted.

6. CATEGORISATION OF SCHOOLS 2017

The Committee considered a National Categorisation Summary Report for Carmarthenshire Schools for the 2016/17 academic year. The information outlined within the report highlighted the current position of the County's schools as well as areas for improvement.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:

In response to a question as to whether there were enough Challenge Advisors in Carmarthenshire, the Head of School Effectiveness acknowledged that there was a shortage as the core team for Carmarthenshire was only 6 officers at present. However, the shortfall was addressed by commissioning head teachers who acted as additional Challenge Advisors. These individuals all received the same training in order to ensure consistency across the service. The Committee was advised that an additional advisor was joining the Authority after Easter and further recruitment was planned for the summer.

Reference was made to a recent Committee school visit where the head teacher had received visits from three different challenge advisors in one year and each giving different advice. Concern was therefore expressed at the lack of consistency in terms of the advice and challenge given to schools. The Head of School Effectiveness acknowledged that changes of Challenge Advisor have occurred with some schools due to revised Core / Commissioned Team arrangements. He added that officers continue to ensure consistency across their work which is well supported by regular joint-training events. In addition, schools are now working effectively within a 'self-improving' environment. For example, numerous 'Green schools' provide support for their colleagues as part of the ERW 'menu of support' content. He added that unfortunately, due to vacancies in the core team, a reallocation of some Challenge Advisors has had to be implemented in support of our schools.

Clarification was sought as to how a school's category was decided and agreed upon. The Head of School Effectiveness reminded the Committee that a school's category was decided upon following the first Core Visit of the academic year and discussions between the challenge advisor, head teacher, the governing body and

the senior management team. Schools were encouraged to suggest which support category they felt was appropriate for their situation and this was discussed and challenged further by Challenge Advisors in consultation with the relevant parties. The final category was agreed by all involved within the process and where there was disagreement, this was recorded officially in a report. He also reminded the Committee that national external factors (e.g. performance of e-FSM learners) could impact on the final support category in which a school was placed.

In response to a suggestion that there were in fact two education departments operating within Carmarthenshire, one being the ERW School Improvement Service and the other being the Authority's Education Department, the Interim Director of Education & Children's Services stated that the school improvement function was commissioned from ERW and therefore there was no duplication. The Authority did not have separate school improvement officers. He added that the arrangements within ERW allowed for much closer working relationships between officers of both organisations.

Concern was expressed that the pressure experienced by secondary schools to achieve the higher support categories (heavily linked to examination results), was leading to some schools presenting pupils for GCSE examinations, a year beforehand and that this was placing undue and unfair pressure on pupils. It was suggested that pupils might achieve far better results having studied for two whole years than being forced to study the whole curriculum in one year. The Head of School Effectiveness acknowledged the Committee's concern and noted that this very issue had been discussed by ERW. He agreed that the process should be about ensuring that pupils were able to do their best and that their achievement was the most important factor and not the school's category ranking. He stated that effective schools tracked individual pupils' progress regularly over the two years of the course provision and that early-entry practice should be used as a diagnostic tool in support of learners. He added that the Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Education had recently raised concerns about early-entry practice on a national level. The Interim Director of Education & Children's Services also acknowledged the Committee's concerns and reassured members that he had been discussing this matter with individual secondary schools in recent months. The Executive Board Member for Education & Children noted that the Welsh Government had previously included numeracy and mathematics within the L2i performance data and this had led to schools feeling pressured into presenting pupils for examinations earlier than normal. This had now been changed to either numeracy or mathematics so the practice was expected to reduce.

It was asked whether the performance of pupils based in special educational needs units was considered when deciding on the support categories of secondary schools. The Head of School Effectiveness confirmed that this was the case within the defining of the national 'Standards Group'. He also advised the Committee that whilst four of the secondary schools' categories had been influenced by its Key Stage 4 e-FSM learners' performance, it was important to remember that the categories were about the support that schools required to achieve better standards.

It was noted that there appeared to be a marked difference between the graphs showing improvements made by primary schools and those in the secondary sector. The Head of School Effectiveness stated that whilst it might appear that way, this was due to comparing 12 secondary schools with over a 100 primary

schools. He again reminded the Committee that the important issue was the support that came with the different categories and that locally, schools could move up or down a category dependent on the measures a school might have put in place during the year. Whilst this might not be reflected nationally, on a local level, officers were working closely with schools to support the improvement agenda.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2016/17

Councillor A. James had earlier declared an interest that he is a governor at Llangadog CP School.

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report relating to the 2016/17 financial year as at 31st December 2016 for the Education & Children Department. It was advised that the report indicated a current potential year end overspend of £1,767,000 in its revenue budget and that the capital programme showed a net variance of -£6,550,000 against the 2016/17 approved budget.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:

In response to a question regarding the on-going costs associated with early voluntary retirement (EVR) and redundancy for teachers, the Interim Director of Education & Children's Services informed the Committee that during recent months, officers had been working on new arrangements to support schools in relation to this matter, including the revision of relevant policies. A Panel had been established and would be made up of officers from Human Resources, Financial Services and the Education & Children Department. The Panel would be chaired by the Director and its aim was to challenge and assist schools in relation to restructuring, releasing staff and the efficient use of their budgets. Additional work had also been undertaken to collect data on school staffing structures. In the longer term, the department wanted to develop a re-deployment policy for schools which would require governing bodies to consider teachers at risk (due to school closures for example) and the possible use of financial incentives for schools who took on at-risk staff from other schools.

In response to a query regarding the vacant educational psychologist post, the Interim Director of Education & Children's Services stated that due to an officer retiring, the post would not be replaced in order to achieve efficiency savings. However, he stressed that this would not affect provision as new ways of working that had been adopted in light of the recent Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill, would mitigate any impact associated with the loss of this post.

Clarification was sought as to the strategies being developed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Music Service. The Interim Director of Education & Children's Services informed the Committee that officers were seeking to re-model the service in light of the Donaldson recommendations as schools could opt-out of procuring music teaching services, making it vulnerable at a time when budgets were being reduced. One key development would be to utilise the peripatetic

teachers for both teaching musical instruments as well as providing curriculum support for the 'creative' element of the future curriculum, as recommended by the Donaldson Review. The Welsh Government was also establishing an endowment fund for music services in recognition of the financial pressure being experienced by local authorities but no further details had been received as yet.

In response to a question on the proposed development of a new school building for Ysgol Gymraeg Dewi Sant in Llanelli, the Modernisation Programme Manager informed the Committee that the Authority's preferred site was on the Llanerch Playing Fields, next to the school's current location. He acknowledged that there was some local opposition to the proposed development but that a pre-planning consultation exercise would provide all interested parties to formally submit comments and voice concerns. The consultation exercise would be required prior to the Authority seeking planning consent for the development.

Concern was expressed at the on-going delays in developing new primary school facilities in Ammanford, as well as slippages in other Band A projects such as Llangadog. The Modernisation Programme Manager acknowledged the concerns and agreed that re-organisation of primary provision in the Ammanford town area was required, along with new facilities. He reminded the Committee that the Authority had to utilise all its funding for Band A projects by 2019 but due to the changing demographics and regeneration plans for the town, it would have been unlikely that the Ammanford project would have been completed by this time. This was the case in other areas of the County and other projects had therefore been prioritised ahead of projects such as Ammanford in order to minimise the risk of losing the funding. However, he reassured members that work to develop proposals and identify suitable land in Ammanford, alongside officers from the Regeneration & Policy Division, was progressing.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. 2016/17 IMPROVEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 3 – 1ST APRIL TO 31ST DECEMBER 2016

The Committee received for scrutiny the 2016/17 Improvement Plan Performance Report for Quarter 3 with regard to the actions and measures relevant to its remit.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

Clarification was sought for the staff shortage hampering the delivery of the Flying Start health visiting service. The Head of Children's Services informed the Committee that there was a national shortage of health visitors and that those who had been recruited were also operating within the Health Board services and therefore had limited capacity to pick up as many caseloads in the Flying Start areas.

In response to a question on the future of the Flying Start programme, the Head of Children's Services noted that it remained a flagship programme for the Welsh Government and although funding was only confirmed year on year, the future of the programme itself did not appear to be under imminent threat.

An explanation was sought for the delays caused by non-attendance at Education Psychology appointments. The Interim Director of Education & Children's Services stated that this could be due to parents not attending appointments or meetings being cancelled due to other professionals not being able to attend. Failure to receive reports from Health Board practitioners also led to meetings being cancelled and subsequent delays in the process.

In response to a question on the Child and Family Unit (CFU) systemic model of working across children's services teams, the Head of Children's Services updated the Committee on the roll-out of the new approach in the Authority's Child Care Teams. He added that even though this action was on target, the roll-out had identified the need for specific workers in certain areas and this was being addressed.

More information was sought as to the future work of the Vulnerable Young People's Panel. The Interim Director of Education & Children's Services informed the Committee that the Panel met on a quarterly basis with the aim of co-ordinating support for vulnerable young people in Key Stage 4. A paper regarding the future development of the work of this Panel had been discussed by the Departmental Management Team in January 2017 and further work was now being undertaken to ensure that such learners were achieving qualifications.

In response to a question regarding the appointment of a Behaviour & Attendance Manager, the Interim Director of Education & Children's Services confirmed that a new structure for this service area had been agreed and the recruitment process for this post would be commencing shortly.

Further details were requested in relation to the difficulties in recruiting foster carers within the County. The Head of Children's Services noted that recruitment of foster carers was a problem across the UK and that the Authority found itself in competition with both the private sector and with neighbouring authorities. The allowances offered by other authorities in the region were more competitive than Carmarthenshire and whilst allowances were not necessarily a prospective carer's main consideration, it did often sway potential carer's decisions in what was at times a difficult role to undertake.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS AND REFERRALS UPDATE

Reference was made to the County Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and it was asked whether feedback had been received from the Welsh Government. The Interim Director of Education & Children's Services informed the Committee that the Welsh Government Minister for Lifelong Learning & Welsh Language had made a statement to the Welsh Assembly in relation to the way forward for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. The statement had been a general comment regarding the plans received and that officers were expecting a more detailed response regarding Carmarthenshire's plan from the Welsh Government in due course. He agreed to circulate details of any response to the Committee.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 22ND DECEMBER 2016

It was noted that Councillor M.J.A. Lewis was in fact the Vice-President of the Carmarthenshire Young Farmers Association and not the Welsh Association.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that subject to the amendment above, the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd December 2016, be signed as a correct record.

11. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 26TH JANUARY 2017

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th January 2017, be signed as a correct record.

12. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE EDUCATION & CHILDREN AND SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEES, HELD ON THE 25TH JANUARY 2017

Mrs. A. Pickles noted that her apologies for this meeting had not been recorded.

Councillor A. James also wished to clarify that his declaration of interest was incorrect and that it was in fact his wife that was a nurse and not his daughter.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that subject to the amendments noted above, the minutes of the joint meeting held on the 25th January 2017, be received.

13. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING FOR ALL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES, HELD ON THE 15TH FEBRUARY 2017

Mrs. A. Pickles clarified that her declaration of interest was incorrect and that it should have read: *"She is the Director of a Community Interest Company which provides Counselling Therapy courses. The Company may submit or be part of a consortium that might submit a tender to the Council in the future"*.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that subject to the amendment noted above, the minutes of the joint meeting for all scrutiny committees, held on the 25th January 2017, be received.

SIGNED: _____ (Chair)

DATE: _____