

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 26TH JANUARY 2017

PRESENT: Councillor J.E. Williams [Chair]

Councillors: D.J.R. Bartlett, J.M. Charles, I.W. Davies, W.G. Hopkins, P. Hughes-Griffiths, J.D. James, M.J.A. Lewis, D.W.H. Richards and D.E. Williams (In place of C.A. Campbell)

Mrs E. Heyes – Parent Governor Member (Llanelli Area)

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

Mrs V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Mrs A. Pickles – Parent Governor (Carmarthen Area)

Mrs J. Voyle Williams – Church in Wales Representative

Also in attendance:

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. Rees – Head of Learner Programmes

Mr S. Smith – Head of Children's Services

Mr D. Astins – Strategic Development Manager

Mr S. Davies – School Modernisation Manager

Mrs M. Evans Thomas – Principal Democratic Services Officer

Venue: Chamber, Council Offices, 3 Spilman Street, Carmarthen: 10:00 – 11:35am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.A. Campbell, A. James, P.E.M. Jones and J. Williams.

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

No public questions were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on Wednesday, 15th March, 2017 be noted.

6. CSSIW INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Mrs Bobbie Jones, Strategy Inspector with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW).

The Committee considered a report outlining the CSSIW's findings and recommendations for Children's Services in Carmarthenshire County Council, following its inspection of the services in July 2016. Mrs Jones was the Lead Inspector with the team which undertook the inspection and provided the Committee with feedback on the team's findings.

The inspection took place during a period of significant change as the Council was in the process of implementing the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. The Authority was also bringing in revised social work operating models across Children's Services. The inspection was piloting a revised approach to Local Authority inspection, with greater emphasis on understanding how the delivery of social services improves outcomes for children and families in need of care and support.

Mrs Jones emphasised that this was not a full inspection as it was a pilot using new tools and methodology. Between 30 and 40 case files were reviewed, numerous social workers were interviewed and the findings were very positive. The inspection focussed on the access arrangements for children and found that Carmarthenshire is committed to providing information on the services available, however, more work is needed to raise awareness in relation to early help provision.

With regard to the provision of information services, she pointed out that the Act only came into force in April and the inspection was undertaken in July, however, some good foundations were being laid. With regard to leadership, management and governance arrangements it was clear that children's services are prioritised within the Council. She felt that it would be useful for the Committee to have some more explicit feedback from families about what they think of the preventative services and receiving early help. She felt that some more work was required with partners to make sure that they are aware of their responsibilities under the Social Services & Well-Being Act and she suggested that this could possibly be done via the Regional Partnership Board. The team was very impressed by the fact that the workforce is experienced, stable and very committed to working in an open and transparent way. She concluded by saying that there is some excellent work being done in Carmarthenshire.

The Chair thanked Mrs Jones for her presentation and felt that the report was very positive, however, there were areas to further develop.

Officers welcomed the report which they considered to be balanced and fair and advised the Committee that they were already implementing the recommendations. It was still early days in terms of change following the new legislation, however, good progress was being made.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:-

- Concern was expressed that, as children are moulded as a person during their early years, officers were asked whether they try to influence parents as they are the role models. The Head of Children's Services pointed out that if parents are not aware of what the issues are then how are they expected to do anything and it was a matter of identifying and clarifying the issue and helping parents to work out what needs to change/be done. It was a shared objective/outcome and the new Signs of Safety model which was currently being introduced would help in this regard. He added that progress was being made in this area;
- Concern was expressed over the pressures already facing schools and officers were asked whether it would be possible to employ a dedicated individual to deal with these issues, perhaps working within a cluster of schools. The Head of Children's Services explained that there are a lot of preventative and community services available and it was a matter of making sure that people are aware of the services and support that are available;
- Members welcomed the report which was very encouraging and positive.

RESOLVED that the report and outcomes following the CSSIW inspection of Children's Services be noted.

7. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT 2015-2016

The Committee considered a report and received a presentation on School Performance and Achievement 2015/16 which provided an overview of the following:-

- quantitative school performance and attendance data;
- external qualitative judgements (Estyn);
- values and skills achievement in Carmarthenshire schools.

The report contained a summary of teacher assessments, test and examination results for pupils in the Foundation Phase, Key Stages 2, 3, 4 and 5. Results were compared to targets set, performance in previous years and the all Wales average. There was also a summary of performance of the schools inspected by Estyn during the academic year 2015/16.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:

- Concern was expressed in relation to a dip in primary school attendance levels, however, the increase in secondary schools was welcomed. It was pleasing to note that improving attendance levels continues to be a priority;

- Officers were asked whether the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which is mandatory in Wales, was preventing teachers from becoming head teachers. The Committee was advised that this qualification was being reviewed by the Welsh Government when the question of whether it posed difficulties would be explored.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

8. E&C SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH REVIEW 2015/16 FINAL REPORT: NARROWING THE ATTAINMENT GAP - LEARNERS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS

At its meeting held on 24th September, 2015, during consideration of the provisional Examination and Teacher Assessment Results, the Committee noted that one of the priorities for the Authority during the 2015/16 academic year was to improve the performance of those learners eligible for free school meals (e-fsm) and that this was a national as well as a local priority. The Committee therefore decided to establish a Task and Finish Group to research and review the attainment gap for learners eligible for free school meals.

The Group met on 7 occasions and considered evidence and information from a wide variety of sources. The sessions were designed to provide the Group with the relevant information, context and background to the topic. In addition, the Group received evidence from a number of experts in the field of education.

The Committee proceeded to consider the final report of the Task and Finish Group which contained 11 key conclusions and culminated in 8 recommendations.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to the members of the Group and officers involved for their commitment and also to the range of experts who had given presentations to the Group.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the Group's report and recommendations to the Executive Board for further consideration.

9. EXPLANATION FOR THE NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submission of the Council's Well-Being Objectives 2017/18 be noted.

10. MINUTES - 21ST NOVEMBER 2016

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November, 2016 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE