

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2018

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price [Chair]

Councillors:

S.M. Allen (in place of I.W. Davies), K.V. Broom, 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 and D.T. Williams

Mrs M. Jones – Parent Governor [Dinefwr Area]

Mrs V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Mrs J. Voyle-Williams – Church in Wales Representative

The following members of the Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee were also present for consideration of Agenda Item 4:

Councillors:

R. Evans, W.T. Evans, K. Lloyd, B.A.L. Roberts and G. Thomas.

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 A. Morgan	-	Head of Education Services
Mr A. Rees	-	Head of Curriculum & Wellbeing
Mr S. Smith	-	Head of Children's Services
Mr S. Davies	-	Modernisation Services Manager
Ms B. James	-	Service Manager Corporate Parenting & Child Welfare
Ms M. Williams	-	Young Carer Lead
Ms S. Nolan	-	Group Accountant
Mrs M. Evans Thomas	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen : 10.00 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for were received from Councillors L. Bowen and I.W. Davies and from Mrs G. Cornock-Evans and Mr J. Davies (Parent Governor Members) and from Councillor K. Davies, A. McPherson and E. Morgan (members of the Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee).

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

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
B.W. Jones	6 – Carmarthenshire Admissions Forum – Review of Admissions Round 2018/19 and Admission Arrangements 2019/20 and 2020/21	Her son teaches at Ysgol Parc-y-Tywyn

B.W. Jones	7 – MEP School Organisation Code 2018	Her son teaches at Ysgol Parc-y-Tywyn
D. Jones	5 – Early Voluntary Retirement and Redundancy Budget	Her sister and brother-in-law work in the Education Department
D. Jones	8 – Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2018/19	Her sons are members of the Carmarthenshire Music Service
G. Jones	5 – Early Voluntary Retirement and Redundancy Budget	His wife works in the Education Department
E. Schiavone	5 – Early Voluntary Retirement and Redundancy Budget	His wife works in Q.E. High School

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. CARMARTHENSHIRE YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARER SERVICES

The Committee received a presentation providing an overview of the services available for young carers and young adult carers across Carmarthenshire, which included the following:-

- a young carer is someone under 18 whose life is restricted because of the need to take responsibility for a family member due to sickness, disability, mental health or alcohol and drug problems;
- a young adult carer is someone who is between 16 and 25;
- there are 11,500 young carers in Wales;
- the average age of a young carer is 12 years old;
- 64% of young carers have been caring for 3 or more years and 1:5 miss school because of their caring responsibilities;
- 1 in 3 young carers spend between 11 and 20 hours per week caring;
- 1 in 12 secondary aged pupils are young carers;
- there are many issues which may affect young carers including loneliness, depression; lack of sleep, educational difficulties, social isolation, trust issues, bullying and suicidal thoughts.

Carmarthenshire Young Carers Service currently supports approximately 40 young carers up to the age of 18. This support includes holiday activities, referral onto appropriate agencies, a break from caring, focussed support, advocacy and peer support.

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

- Asked how the service is promoted in colleges, the Committee was advised that it is mainly the Young Adult Carer Service which is involved with colleges where they do drop-in sessions twice a week. The service has excellent links with the mentors in the colleges in the county;
- Asked how the service supports home educated children, the Committee was advised that, as an Authority, we have an Elective Home Education

policy and those children who are home educated and have been identified as being carers and may be vulnerable are monitored and supported by the service. Any children who have enrolled in a school but then opt out must inform the Local Authority, however, if a child has never enrolled in a school there is no requirement to register and it is more difficult to identify these children. In the past, forms used by the service in relation to parental mental health have only asked if there are any children in the home. These forms are being amended to ask if the children are in full time education which will assist in this regard;

- Reference was made to the importance of identifying young carers and officers were asked if they attend school assemblies and ask those who care for a family members to raise their hands. The Committee was advised that this is no longer done as many young carers do not want people to know. Other initiatives are used instead such as competitions to identify which celebrities were young carers. This involves the young person including their name on the form which includes a tick box asking if they are a young carer and if they need help;
- Asked what elected members can do to support the service, the Committee was informed that officers are working hard to highlight the Investors in Carers scheme. GP surgeries are well placed to identify young carers and for them to achieve the Investors in Carers silver award they need to provide more information. If elected members could help to spread the word it would be greatly appreciated;
- Reference was made to the fact that a mental health service for children and a school counselling service is needed and concern was expressed that there is a lack of capacity in the service to meet the need;
- Whilst acknowledging the importance of children staying with their family, officers were asked at what point is the decision made to remove them.
- With regard to children who are home educated, officers were asked what procedures there are in place to ensure that parents have the resources and ability to do that. The Committee was advised that officers have concerns in that regard as the criteria set by the Welsh Government are so vague that it is difficult to challenge their standards of ability to educate their child;
- Great concern was expressed over suicide rates amongst young people and the importance of improving the way that schools deal with children with mental health issues was stressed. The Committee was informed that there is a lot of research and media coverage highlighting what is being called a crisis among young people. There has been a tremendous shift in the understanding of the issues involved over recent years. The important thing is to realise that there must be a collaborative approach. The wellbeing of children is a priority;
- Reference was made to the fact that in some cultures children just see it as their duty to look after family and officers were asked what is being done with ethnic minorities in this regard. The Committee was advised that a Task and Finish Group is being set up to look at how we engage more with ethnic minority groups and how we develop the service in this regard. There is a growing multicultural society in Carmarthenshire and we need to look at how we promote our services to that society;
- With regard to home educated children, officers were asked if the Authority does enough to engage with these families as the children may be receiving an adequate education, however, they are missing out on interaction with other children. The Committee was advised that from a Local Authority

point of view it is quite a challenge because there is no funding available to help home educated children. Even in instances where the headteacher wants to help, the Welsh Government does not allow for that. A fundamental change is needed in order to allow for support to be provided. There are a number of challenges which officers are in discussion about.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

5. EARLY VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT AND REDUNDANCY BUDGET

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

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the Early Voluntary Retirement and Redundancy Budget, following a request by the Committee earlier in the year for further details on the approach taken and progress made in relation to School Redundancy and Early Voluntary Retirement (EVR).

The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 established that expenditure in respect of the dismissal or premature retirement of any person and expenditure in respect of teachers' emoluments are part of the Local Authority budget. These costs are outside the direct control of the Department but the Department will seek to work with schools and trade unions to reduce the overall impact of staff termination costs.

School based staff are recruited by Governing Bodies and are employees of Carmarthenshire County Council. Schools can have a budget shortfall due to a range of issues but predominantly it is due to a falling pupil roll. When that happens it can lead to a review of staffing and potential reductions in the school workforce. When staff become surplus to requirements the costs of releasing the staff are borne by the Council.

The budget allocated to address Early Voluntary Retirement and Redundancy costs is held by the Department of Education & Children's Services. The majority of the budget is locked in as it relates to pension contributions and other costs for staff released in previous years. Elements of these costs will continue until pensioners die. There is less than £100k budget available to meet new expenditure arising within the year, which is giving rise to a significant projected over-spend in the current year. For a number of years this budget has been under considerable pressure and has persistently over-spent over recent years by significant amounts. Current predictions are that the budget will overspend by £300k in 2018/19.

With further significant rationalisation of the schools network planned through the MEP, some rural primary schools experiencing a continuing decline in forecast pupil numbers despite a generally increasing birth rate, and with secondary school pupil numbers forecast to decline for a couple of years yet, there is little prospect of the pressures on this budget easing in the foreseeable future. Officers have been reviewing processes and practice in order to better manage expenditure and ensure that all business cases presented are robustly challenged. Some changes made to date include:-

- the Premature Retirement and Redundancy Discretionary Compensation

- and School Safer Recruitment Policies have been reviewed and updated;
- the discretionary “added years” element has been removed;
- regular meetings are held between Finance, Human Resources and Education to consider this agenda;
- all current school structures have been analysed in order to develop a “Carmarthenshire Model School Staffing Structure” for different sized Schools;
- a “Change Panel Process” has been developed to challenge schools on Their plans which aligns the school process with the corporate process.

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

- Reference was made to the fact that the budget is overspent year on year and officers were asked why they don't make sure that the budget is correct in the first place. The Director explained that that question is asked every year, however, we are in challenging financial times. He reassured the Committee that he would be making representations again this year in this regard;
- Concern was expressed that less than £100k is available for new retirees and officers were asked what happens in cases of normal retirement and whether that budget is also overspent. The Committee was advised that contributions made by members fund the normal retirement applications. If you are made redundant you are entitled to be treated as though you had gone down the normal retirement route. The schools gets the efficiency savings but the cost of compensation falls on the Authority;
- Reference was made to the role of school governors and officers were asked if they are prepared to make a decision with regard to redundancy when required or do they delay and lead the school further into the red. Officers were asked if perhaps this should be included in the school governors' programme of training. The Head of Education Services advised the Committee that the response of governing bodies to such situations varies from school to school. Some are proactive whilst others are less satisfactory. He added that he would pursue the issue of training with colleagues in learning and development;
- Asked how many people have left on EVR or redundancy, the Director agreed to circulate this information via e-mail;
- Asked whether relocation is considered when the need for a reduction in staff is identified at a school, the Committee was advised that when schools receive their budget allocation in March they will start planning their staffing etc. for the coming September. If, consequently, a teacher loses their job officers liaise with other schools in an attempt to secure alternative employment;
- Reference was made to the fact that schools need to be made aware that there are implications in making someone redundant under a certain age. The Director advised the Committee that not many schools have teachers over the age of 55 so now we are facing the possibility of compulsory redundancy for under 50s but then there are no implications on the Authority because they would not be eligible to access their pension. He added that it would be possible to arrange a workshop for the Committee on teachers' pensions.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. CARMARTHENSHIRE ADMISSIONS FORUM - REVIEW OF ADMISSION ROUND 2018/19 AND ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2019/20 AND 2020/21

[NOTE: Councillor B.W. Jones had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered a report providing a review of the Admission Round 2018/19 and Admission Arrangements 2019/20 and 2020/21, following a request by the Committee earlier in the year for a report on the school admissions and appeals process.

The Committee considered a report providing a detailed overview and position statement with regard to school admission arrangements. This report is presented to the Admissions Forum for consideration and review every year.

It was noted that Local Authorities, Governing Bodies of maintained schools, Admission Appeals Panels and Admissions Forums have school admission functions assigned to them under the School Standards and Framework Act 1988. Each of these bodies has a statutory duty to act in accordance with the School Admissions Code and the School Admission Appeals Code.

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

- Asked if there was any intention to move from three admissions per year to one for 3 and 4 years, the Committee was advised that this is being currently being discussed as part of the review of the Authority's admission arrangements;
- Reference was made to the fact that when a child with SEN joins a school there is no additional support for the school and officers were asked if there are any plans to change that because it puts a lot of stress on the school. The Committee was advised that in such instances each case is considered on an individual basis. There is no funding available, however, resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible;
- Reference was made to capacity within the sector and officers were asked if the MEP and WESP are factored in. The Committee was advised that with regards to primary schools it is fundamentally around investment. For secondary schools, if a significant increase or decrease in capacity is proposed then there is a statutory process which must be followed.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME - SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018

[NOTE: Councillor B.W. Jones had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered the Modernising Education Programme School Organisation Code 2018. The previous Code came into force on 1st October, 2013. Following three years of operation the Welsh Government reviewed the Code, reflecting on learning and feedback received.

From the 1st November, 2018 the Welsh Government implemented an updated School Organisation Code. These changes alter the requirements to take forward

proposals which involve changes to schools, new schools or school closures. The most substantial change is the strengthening of the code in respect of a presumption against closure of rural schools.

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

- The definition of a “rural school” was queried and officers were asked if the schools included in the list have been validated to make sure that they are in fact rural schools. The Committee was advised that the information has not been validated by the Authority as the Welsh Government has a formula for identifying schools across Wales but they have not shared the formula;
- Reference was made to the list of rural schools included in the report and officers were asked why Llanddarog is not included in the list. The Committee was advised that this is why officers have taken the step to include the additional stage in the consultation process.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2018/19

[NOTE: Councillor D. Jones had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report in relation to the Education and Children Service which provided an update on the latest budgetary position as at 31st August, 2018, in respect of the 2018/19 financial year.

The Education and Children Service was projecting an overspend of £1,905k on the revenue budget and a variance of +£756k against the 2018/19 approved capital budget.

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

- Reference was made to the fact that schools set their budgets in March but they do not receive their grant allocation until October and concern was expressed that by the end of the year they are in deficit because they did not receive as much as they were expecting. The Committee was advised that officers are also frustrated at this situation. Last year was the longest delay experienced, however, it was totally beyond the Authority’s control;
- Officers were asked about the current position with regard to additional funding for the music service. The Committee was advised that between £52k-£58k will be allocated to the service in the next financial year. A paper is being produced on the future of the service which will be presented to the Executive Board for consideration;
- Reference was made to problems with the Health Service not contributing their share and officers were asked about the current position. The Committee was informed that the Authority is continuing to face difficulties in trying to convince health colleagues to part with their contribution.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

The Committee received an Annual Report detailing the work of the Committee during the 2017/18 municipal year. The report had been prepared in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution which requires Scrutiny Committees to prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committee's activities over the previous year.

The report provided an overview of the Committee's work programme and the key issues considered during the year including those issues referred to/from the Executive Board and other Scrutiny Committees. The report also provided details of development sessions and site visits arranged for the Committee as well as attendance data.

RESOLVED that the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2017/18 be endorsed.

10. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS AND REFERRALS UPDATE

The Committee received a report detailing the progress achieved in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

11. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORTS

The Committee noted the reasons for the non-submission of the following reports:-

- Youth Support Service Business Plan
- Local Authority Education Services Self Evaluation

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

12. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items for the next meeting. In view of the need to allocate sufficient time for effective scrutiny of the revenue budget and departmental business plan, it was felt that the number of other items on the agenda should be limited. It was therefore proposed that the Healthy Schools Initiative be moved to the January meeting and consequently, the New Children's Zone be moved from January to the March meeting.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on 20th December, 2018, minus the Healthy Schools Initiative report, be agreed.

13. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 27TH SEPTEMBER, 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 27th September, 2018 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE