

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23rd November 2015

Present: Councillor J.E. Williams (Chair)

Councillors: 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

Mr. S. Pearson – Parent Governor Member
Mrs. V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance:
Councillor G.O. Jones – Executive Board Member for Education & Children

The following officers were in attendance:

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. S. Davies – School Modernisation Manager
Mrs. S. Nolan – Group Accountant
Ms. B. Dolan – Senior Consultant

Venue: County Hall Chamber, Carmarthen (11:05am – 12:05pm)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors D.J.R. Bartlett and P.E.M. Jones.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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 17th December 2015.

RESOLVED to note the list of forthcoming items.

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6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2015/16

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Reports relating to the 2015/16 financial year as at the end of August for the Education & Children Department. It was advised that the latest revenue budget forecast showed a slight improvement in the overspend at £950k and this had potential to improve if contingency within some of the forecasts were not utilised before the year end.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:

School based EVR and redundancy costs were referred to and it was asked whether or not the Authority had any control over this. The Director noted that redundancies were sometimes challenged where it was felt they were unnecessary and a small number declined. Budget pressures in schools were leading to increasing numbers outside of the Authority's control.

Clarification was requested in relation to the £150k planned contribution to respite care from the Local Health Board (LHB) which was unlikely to be achieved during the year. The Head of Children's Services stated that the debate hinged upon the nature of the need which the LHB viewed as social rather medical whereas the Authority argued that complex medical reasons caused the need for the respite care. They were struggling to come to an agreement.

It was asked what percentage of the education budget was passed down to schools. The Director did not have the precise figures to hand but the target was set at 85% which had been achieved over the last few years and was approximately 83% this year. Funding is held centrally to support additional learning needs and for statutory duties such as appointing school governors and schools admissions. He agreed to circulate the figures following the meeting.

Further information was requested regarding the overspend in Adult Community Learning. The Head of Learner Programmes advised that a report had been taken to the Corporate Management Team regarding the latest position and this was due to be presented to the Committee at its next meeting. Some contracts had been terminated however they were hoping to draw down European Social Funding to help maintain the service.

It was asked if there were any concerns about the future of the music service. The Head of Learner Programmes stated that the funding from school budgets was a considerable item of expenditure, therefore schools were reviewing their charging policies accordingly. The aim was to ensure the service was self-financing. It was also hoped that there was some scope for savings e.g. early internal discussion regarding possible collaboration across the hub with Pembrokeshire.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

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7. MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE LLANGENNECH INFANT SCHOOL AND LLANGENNECH JUNIOR SCHOOL AND ESTABLISH LLANGENNECH COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Committee considered the report which included a proposal to proceed to discontinue Llangennech Infant School and Llangennech Junior School and establish a new Llangennech Community Primary School. It was proposed that new School would be a 3-11 Welsh Medium language category with a nursery provision.

The following issues were raised in relation to the report:

The proposal was welcomed as one that was a natural development for the existing schools due to the growth in demand for Welsh medium education there. Other schools in the locality offered English medium provision.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the proposal.

8. WELSH IN EDUCATION

The Committee considered the report which provided an update on the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, performance data in relation to the Welsh language in schools, shared progress in respect to 'Codi Caerau Sir Gâr' and marketing materials as well as other developments relating to Welsh in education.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

The Committee welcomed the report and the progress made however concern was expressed that more places were needed in Welsh medium primary schools to respond to the growth in demand. The CEO/Head of Education Services stated that he was not aware that any child had been refused a place in a Welsh medium school.

It was asked how bilingualism was being promoted to parents and governors. The CEO/Head of Education Services advised that a pack of materials and resources had been created that schools were marketing with parents. Governor seminars were being held later in the week at which the pack would be shared and it would also be available on the corporate website.

The work looking at the reasons for the reduction in transition to Welsh medium secondary provision was welcomed. It was asked what the greatest obstacle was. The CEO/Head of Education Services stated that there were 2 main issues; namely staffing ability to teach through the medium of Welsh and also the statutory process for linguistic change. There was a piece of work this year with a group of schools ready to move along the continuum. The Director added that the requirement for a formal change of status was a major frustration and cited 2 schools that had been operating as Welsh medium schools for the last 4 years however WG insisted a

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formal bureaucratic change. There was also an issue with existing capacity to support the statutory process for schools.

RESOLVED to endorse the report.

9. HALF YEARLY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2015/16

The Committee received, for consideration, the half year Performance Management Report for the services within its remit, for the period 1st April 2015 to 30th September 2015. The report included:

- A. Heads of Service Overview of Performance
- B. Improvement Plan Monitoring – Actions and Performance Measures
- C. Additional Provisional Performance Measures Data
- D. Complaints and Compliments Monitoring

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Concern was expressed at the increase in the number of Year 11 and Year 13 pupils becoming NEET during 2014. The Head of Learner Programmes noted that the increase in numbers was relatively small however a report was being presented to the Local Service Board about the current situation and measures being taken to address it. Careers education and guidance was also being given to Year 11 pupils. The Committee would also consider a report in January on the 3 – 19 curriculum which would include a focus on 14 – 19 learning pathways linking education with the needs of the local, regional and national economy.

The improvement in attendance in both primary and secondary schools was welcomed however it was asked what further improvements could be made. The Strategic Development Manager advised that these were likely to be extremely fine margins given the level of improvement to date. The Director added that the unauthorised absence figures were amongst the best in Wales.

RESOLVED to endorse the report.

10. REFERRAL TO THE EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered a referral from the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee. The Chair explained the background for the referral and updated the Committee on the proposals for a new format for the performance monitoring reports received by scrutiny committees which would be shared with Members at a briefing session on the 14th January 2016 (2:00pm).

RESOLVED to note the referral.

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11. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS AND REFERRALS UPDATE

The Committee considered a report detailing progress in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous scrutiny meetings.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

12. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 24th SEPTEMBER 2015

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

13. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION AND EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 18TH SEPTEMBER 2015

RESOLVED to receive the minutes of the joint Environmental & Public Protection and Education & Children Scrutiny Committee held on the 18th September 2015.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____