

Document Pack

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 January 2020

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair)

Councillors:

L.R. Bowen, K.V. Broom, I.W. Davies, J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E.M.J.G. Schiavone, B. Thomas and D.T. Williams.

Co-opted Members:

J. Davies - Parent Governor
M. Jones - Parent Governor
V. Kenny - Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance: Cllr G. Davies, Executive Board Member for Education and Children

The following Officers were in attendance:

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services
S. Davies, Head of Access to Education
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services
A. Rees, Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing
A. Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
S. Nolan, Group Accountant
L. Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP - 10.00 - 11.55 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E. Thomas and Revd D. Richards.

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

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
M.J.A Lewis	4	Governor of a Federated School

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None received

4. ONE DAY SCRUTINY DRAFT REPORT

(NOTE: Cllr M.J.A Lewis previously declared an interest in this item)

Members received an overview of a draft report which contained the findings of a One Day Scrutiny Inquiry held on the 6th November 2019, which incorporated a good practice guide in relation to the federating of schools.

Members asked whether the draft report could be developed further to create a toolkit for federating schools. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that good practice identified within the report would feed into future guidance on federating and agreed with the Committee that the evidence heard during the inquiry had been very beneficial. The Head of Access to Education advised that, alongside the Director of Education and Children's Services, he attends an All-Wales Group convened by Welsh Government, currently looking at creating a federating toolkit. It was noted that the committee would await the publication of the toolkit, in the first instance.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. APPROVAL TO IMPLEMENT FEDERATION PROPOSALS

Members reviewed a report outlining a proposal to allow the Executive Board Member for Education and Children to determine the outcome of federation proposals. The Head of Access to Education advised that Local Authorities had been granted powers in 2014 to federate schools, however these powers had not been exercised within this authority since that time. Approval from the Executive Board Member to implement federation proposals would be held at the end of a significant consultation process. He further advised that any significant changes to schools are covered a separate School Organisation Code that requires a comprehensive statutory consultation process that takes around twelve months to complete, with the final determination made by County Council. Members received clarification from Officers on the relevant process in relation to calling in decisions made by individual Executive Board Members and the Executive Board.

RESOLVED to recommend that the Executive Board determines the outcome of federation proposals.

6. EDUCATION & CHILDREN DRAFT DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21 - 2023

The Director of Education and Children's Services provided Members with an overview of the draft business plan and drew attention to the departmental priorities for 2020-23 (p.41).

Members referenced the plan to manage the demand and supply of school places which included a review of catchment areas and were advised by the Director of Education and Children's Services that it was in progress, with a focus on aligning catchment areas with the Modernising Education Programme.

Members noted that the Business Plan did not reference the recommendations made by the Rural Affairs Task Group which were approved by Council in September 2019. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that

any recommendations pertinent to the department would be incorporated into the Business Plan.

Reference was made to the School Holiday Enrichment Programme and plans to continue its implementation. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that although the programme did not run in 2019, subject to funding the scheme should run in 2020.

During the discussion members asked for an update on the take-up of the Childcare offer. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that current figures looked very positive with 1146 individuals taking up the offer and 187 providers identified. An update on the take-up to date would be circulated to Members.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2020/21 to 2022/23

The Head of Financial Services gave an overview of the Revenue Budget Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23 and drew Members' attention to the main points of the Provisional Settlement detailed at 2.3 within the report and advised that the Final Settlement was not due to be published until the 25th February 2020. Members were also asked to note the updates at 2.5 in relation to Welsh Government Service Specific Grants and the impact of the Teachers Pensions Employer Contribution noted at 3.2.4.

Members raised the following matters/questions in relation to the report –

In response to a question relating to the budget monitoring for the current financial year (page 132) and the School Delegated Budget overspend, the Head of Education and Inclusion noted that there had been a series of meetings over the last few months with Primary and Secondary Schools. In relation to Primary Schools, he advised that because of the meetings Governing Bodies were more aware of the level of budget cuts required, and in some cases whether their provision was sustainable in the longer term. Additional support had been given to schools facing a significant deficit. Meetings with Secondary Schools had also been very constructive and financial plans were currently being reviewed by the Group Accountant to identify further efficiencies.

Members raised concerns regarding the funding of smaller rural schools and the disadvantages faced in relation to the funding formula and Additional Learning Needs funding. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that there were opportunities for Governing Bodies to respond to this matter as part of the current Budget Consultation should they wish to do so. However, the reality of the current situation was that funding for all schools was tight and there wasn't enough funding available to sustain 110 schools. In relation to the formula for ALN funding, the Director advised that there were significant changes ahead in the way ALN provision would be funded and that there would be challenging times for all schools in relation to the transition.

Further to the previous point, Members noted that the term 'rationalisation' appeared several times within the report and referenced relative savings. Clarification was sought on the number of schools facing possible closure in

relation to rationalisation. The Head of Access to Education advised that at present a reduction of between 15 and 20 schools was being considered with 10 proposals currently under review. To realise these efficiencies, the rationalisation would need to begin in 2020/21 for the budget saving to be realised in 2021/22.

Members referenced Education and Child Psychology and the proposed reduction in the number of Education and Child Psychologists. The Head of Education and Inclusion advised that future changes to ALN provision would transfer some of the work from this department to Inclusion Services. There was no expectation that the reduction would impact on the ongoing work of the department, and grant funding would be utilised where possible to maintain enough support.

RESOLVED to receive the report and the Charging Digest contained within.

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members reviewed the forthcoming items and the Forward Work Programme and considered that some listed items would need to be moved due to operational deadlines. Following a discussion, it was noted that the forthcoming items for the meeting scheduled for 19th February 2020 could be moved to future meetings and an alternative informal workshop and planning session be held.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Chair consider alternative arrangements for the 19th February 2020 and Members be advised accordingly.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 15 OCTOBER 2019

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 15th October 2019 be signed as a correct record.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 25 NOVEMBER 2019

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 25th November 2019 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE