

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 14TH APRIL, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor J.E. Williams [Chair]

Councillors:

S.M. Allen (In place of I.W. Davies), D.J.R. Bartlett, C.A. Campbell, J.M. Charles, W.G. Hopkins, P. Hughes-Griffiths, J.D. James, M.J.A. Lewis, D.W.H. Richards and T. Theophilus

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr G. Morgans	Head of Education Services
Mr A. Rees	Head of Learner Programmes
Ms G. Adams	Principal Manager – Youth Support Services
Ms B. James	Service Manager – Corporate Parenting
Ms F. Lewis	Service Manager – Safeguarding
Mrs M. Evans Thomas	Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen : 10.00 a.m. – 12.50 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES AND OTHER MATTERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors I.W. Davies and P.E.M. Jones and from Mrs A. Pickles (Parent Governor Member) and Canon B. Witt (Church in Wales Representative).

The Chair welcomed to their first meeting Mrs E. Heyes and Mrs K. Hill, newly elected Parent Governor Co-opted Members.

The Chair referred to Mr Simon Pearson whose term as a Parent Governor Co-opted Member had come to an end and it was agreed that a letter of appreciation be sent to Mr Pearson thanking him for his valued contribution during his time as a member of the Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
M.J.A. Lewis	7 - Youth Services Update Report	She trains with the Young Farmers Club and her daughter is the Chair of Carmarthen-shire Y.F.C.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting scheduled to be held on Monday, 23rd May, 2016. It was noted that the list of agenda items was subject to change as the Committee's Forward Work Programme for the 2016/17 municipal year was still being developed.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on Monday, 23rd May, 2016 be noted.

6. MID & WEST WALES ADOPTION SERVICE

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the Mid & West Wales Adoption Service since its establishment in April 2014.

Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Powys came together in April 2014 to form the Mid & West Wales Adoption Service (MWAS) with Carmarthenshire as the Lead Authority. MWAS was part of the National Adoption Service, which was launched formally in November 2014 was made up of a small central team and the 5 regional collaboratives, namely:-

- Mid & West Wales Adoption Service
- South East Wales Adoption Service
- North Wales
- Western Bay (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea)
- Vale, Valleys & Cardiff

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Suzanne Griffiths, Director of the National Adoption Service Wales and Eleri Harries, Senior Practitioner with the Mid & West Wales Adoption Service, who had been invited to give the Committee a presentation on the work of the service.

The presentation provided an overview of the service from a national perspective and outlined the progress made on a regional basis.

The presentation was followed by a question and answer session, following which the Chair thanked Ms Griffiths and Ms Harries for a most informative presentation.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. YOUTH SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

[NOTE: Councillor M.J.A. Lewis had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the progress made by the Youth Support Service and related partners in the following areas:-

- the implementation of the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement & Progression Framework initiative during the 2015/16 academic year;
- a review of the Youth Clubs 2014 Scrutiny Task & Finish Review Action Plan;
- the impact of efficiency savings on the service and progress made with re-structuring.

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

- Reference was made to the excellent work carried out by the Young Farmers' Club (YFC) in relation to youth services and it was felt that the Authority does not work closely enough with the YFC network;
- Concern was expressed for the future of the service if cuts in funding continue year on year. The Head of Learner Programmes stated that any further cuts would affect the service and stressed the need for joined up working, resource sharing etc.;
- Reference was made to the fact that First Time Entrants have fallen from 410 to 49 and the service was praised for this amazing achievement.

RESOLVED

7.1 that the report be received;

7.2 that officers make concerted efforts to strengthen the links between the Authority and the YFC network in the county.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING & SAFEGUARDING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding Panel Annual Report, which detailed how the Council is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities as outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy dictates that every department across the Council must work together and take corporate parenting responsibility for our looked after children. Schools, Leisure, Housing, Youth and Preventative Services, Education & Children's Services have a duty to act in the best interest of the looked after child, as their corporate parents.

In line with the strategy, the Corporate Parenting Panel provides a level of scrutiny, monitoring, oversight and challenge as to how well the Council is doing in meeting the needs of looked after children and care leavers.

The report detailed the number of children looked after by Carmarthenshire County Council and how well they are doing in relation to our aspiration for them as outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Committee's attention was drawn to a typographical error on page 82 of the report where the second sentence in the third paragraph should read "Most care leavers feel that they are in appropriate accommodation but a small number are not."

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

- Officers were asked if there was any way to compare the school attainment levels of looked after children with the Welsh average for KS1 and above. The Chief Education Officer explained that this information would be presented to a future meeting;
- Asked how officers ensure that this issue gets enough attention, the Committee was advised that a training programme has been developed for elected members, schools and foster carers. Officers also intended to re-visit the Corporate Parenting Strategy and remind people of their obligations;
- Reference was made to schools being central in the provision of support, however, concern was expressed that schools already have so much to do and officers were asked what support can be provided. The Committee was advised that training and 1:1 support is provided and additional resources are provided where necessary. A diverse range of services are provided for schools including after school sessions and bespoke training sessions;
- Asked whether officers are satisfied that schools are fully aware of what support is available, the Committee was advised that within the department a Co-ordinator proactively works with schools in this respect. The Co-ordinator identifies looked after children in schools and outlines the assistance available;
- Asked how much information is made available to School Governors regarding looked after children at their school. The Chief Education Officer explained that a directive had recently been published by the Welsh Government on strengthening links with school governors and he would ensure that all school governors are made aware of this information.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The Committee considered a report providing an update on progress made in respect of improving school attendance.

In the ESTYN inspection of the Authority's education services in March 2012 Carmarthenshire was rated as 'Good' with 'Good' prospects for improvement, however, attendance in schools was judged to require improvement. In response to the ESTYN recommendations officers, in partnership with headteachers, agreed certain actions to address the attendance challenge. Headteachers were asked to monitor school attendance, ensuring that the registers were kept fully up to date and that the correct codes were used.

While the parent is primarily responsible for ensuring that their child attends their registered school regularly, where school attendance problems occur, the key to successfully resolving these problems is engaging the child through collaborative working between the parent, the school and the Local Authority. It is important to monitor absences closely and regularly so that any patterns of non-attendance are identified and early action taken to address the underlying causes. Attendance problems were often a symptom of some underlying cause.

Estyn's Annual Report for 2014/15, published in January 2016, stated the following in respect of attendance:-

"Attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools continue to improve well. Over the last five years, attendance has increased in primary and secondary schools by 1.6 and 2.5 percentage points respectively. These increases mean that pupils attended school on average between approximately 3 and 4 days more in 2014/15 than they did in 2010/11.

The Committee was advised of the priorities for 2016/17 which included working more closely with the schools performing below their benchmark in order to secure further improvements and working more closely with Challenge Advisors to support schools in meeting their identified attendance targets.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

10. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee considered the explanation provided for the non-submission of the report on the Modernising Education Programme Proposal to Formally Unify Llangennech Schools.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submission be noted.

CHAIR

DATE