

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th JUNE 2016

Present: Councillor J.E. Williams (Chair)

Councillors: D.J.R. Bartlett, C.A. 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

Mrs. V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative
Mrs. E. Heyes – Parent Governor Member (Llanelli Area)
Mrs. K. Hill – Parent Governor Member (Dinefwr Area)
Mrs. A. Pickles – Parent Governor Member (Carmarthen Area)

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. R. Sully – 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. C. Griffiths – Challenge Adviser (with responsibility for Welsh)
Mr. R. James – Performance Planning & Business Officer (*for Items 10 and 11*)
Mr. M. Morden – Learning Transformation Manager
Ms. S. Nolan – Group Accountant (*for Item 7*)
Mr. M. Hughes – Democratic Services Officer

Venue: County Hall Chamber, Carmarthen (10:10am – 12:15pm)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.E.M. Jones and J. Williams as well as Canon B. Witt. Apologies were also received from Councillor G.O. Jones (Executive Board Member for Education & Children).

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Councillor P. Hughes-Griffiths	Item 9	He is a governor at Ysgol Bro Myrddin. He informed the Committee that whilst he could take part and vote, he would not be contributing to discussions during consideration of this item.

3. DECLARATION 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 its next meeting, scheduled for Thursday 22nd September 2016, be noted.

6. 11-19 LEARNING NETWORK UPDATE

The Committee considered a report outlining the findings of the Carmarthenshire 11-19 Curriculum Review. Members were informed that the Local Authority and Coleg Sir Gâr had jointly commissioned the review as both organisations considered that a shared strategic approach was needed to deliver 11-19 education and training in Carmarthenshire in the future. The recommendations contained within the report set out the actions required to implement the new curriculum and ensure that young people were both well-educated and suitably prepared for the next phase in their lives.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Reference was made to the ESTYN Annual Report in 2015 which highlighted the role of schools, colleges and local authorities in working together to develop a curriculum relevant both to learners and the key sectors of the local economy and it was asked what the timescale for this joint working was likely to be. The Director also informed the Committee that it was envisaged that this would be in place by 2021, tying in with the introduction of the new national curriculum.

It was also suggested that many secondary schools were uneasy at the prospect of losing pupils to Coleg Sir Gâr and it was asked how these proposals could be implemented without creating competition between providers and whether the courses offered by the College would be available through the medium of Welsh? The Learning Transformation Manager informed the Committee both the Local Authority and Coleg Sir Gâr viewed post-16 education in Carmarthenshire as a mixed-economy provision. The Committee was also informed that further education colleges were under more pressure from the Welsh Government to deliver more courses through the medium of Welsh and that Coleg Sir Gâr were working towards this. The Director of Education & Children's Services noted that the aim of this review and the resulting recommendations was to get rid of any sense of competition between providers and ensure that young people were offered the best provision. He acknowledged the valid concerns of schools but stressed that there was an excellent relationship between the Authority and Coleg Sir Gâr in respect of post-16 provision. However, he noted that no one college or secondary school would be able to offer every possible subject or combination of subjects in the future and therefore, partnership working was essential.

Members welcomed the report and the context and whilst the list of all the relevant strategies past and present, was also appreciated, it was felt that the inclusion of more data on young people's destinations after compulsory full-time education would have been beneficial (e.g. those going on to university, further education

colleges or those becoming NEET). The Learning Transformation Manager welcomed the comments and stated that such data was readily available and that he would be happy to present such information to members at a future meeting.

Disappointment was expressed that whilst the report emphasised the importance of economic and social matters, there was no clear mention or focus on the Welsh language and no reference to the language in any of the recommendations. The Head of Learner Programmes reassured the Committee that the Welsh language was very much at the forefront of this work and enjoyed a prominent position within the overall policy context of this review. He noted that nationally, one of Donaldson's eight 'building blocks' included Welsh receiving a rightful place within the curriculum and that on a local level, the County's 14-19 Welsh-Medium Education Partnership promoted and supported the language in the education sector. The Committee was also informed that Coleg Sir Gâr now had a Welsh language development officer who was actively working within the College to promote the use of the language. The Head of Learner Programmes also referred to recommendation 10 in the report which proposed that the Local Authority, Coleg Sir Gâr and the wider learning partnership 'implement a programme of blended and e-learning learning to deliver the 16-19 curriculum in low take-up AS and A Level subjects in both Welsh and English (from September 2017)'. He explained that there was work on-going to develop a flexible learning package that could allow pupils to follow a particular course through the medium of Welsh, even if numerically, there was little demand for it. This could be done in partnership with other providers and utilising online technology for example. The Learning Transformation Manager added that the report could be amended in light of the Committee's comments.

It was asked how schools were expected to keep track of all the different strategies (as referred to in the report) and ensure that they were meeting the different requirements placed upon them by national and local government, especially as curriculum was constantly being changed and amended. The Learning Transformation Manager acknowledged that this was a point well-made and it highlighted the key role which the Authority had in assisting and supporting schools in the implementation of all these strategies. The Director of Education & Children's Services added that in the past there had been a great deal of frustration as schools often operated in isolation. However, the new curriculum offered an opportunity to create a coherent education system for all schools but that input from schools themselves was a key element in the development of this process.

Clarification was sought as to the role of the Swansea Bay City Region and what collaboration was taking place with other partners. The Learning Transformation Manager stated that on a local level, officers in the Education & Children's Services Department worked closely with colleagues in the Regeneration & Policy Division on matters such as careers / World of Work schemes. The Director of Education & Children confirmed that the Authority was working on a regional basis and acknowledged that the Swansea Bay City Region was taking on an increasing importance as it sought to stimulate and define the economy of the whole area. It was important that the Authority was aware of the types of skills the regional economy would require in the future and that children and young people were being prepared for the jobs of the future. He added that this was a key role for the Regional Learning & Skills Partnership, a sub-group of the City Region.

In response to a question on funding for schools, the Learning Transformation Manager informed the Committee that in September 2014, the Welsh Government

had implemented a new planning and funding system for post-16 education in school sixth forms. The new system brought funding allocations for schools' sixth forms into line with the arrangements for Further Education colleges and Work Based Learning. As of September 2016 however, Welsh Government were now proposing that funding would be based upon programmes of learning rather than qualifications, with each programme having a defined purpose and outcome against which it would be monitored. This now required the Local Authority to plan ahead as well as co-ordinate the delivery of sixth form provision, ensure that duplication of provision was avoided and that the courses provided met local and regional economic priorities. Officers had been undertaking preparatory work with secondary schools to prepare for the new funding system. He informed the Committee that during the transitional period, the Authority was using a funding model based on pupil numbers and funding uplifts for Welsh-medium provision, sparsity and rurality, factors that had been agreed with the secondary school head teachers.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Carmarthenshire 11-19 Curriculum Review be endorsed for consideration by the Executive Board.

7. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2015/16

The Committee considered a report outlining the end of year financial position for the revenue and capital expenditure in relation to the remit of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee, in respect of the 2015/16 financial year. The Committee was informed that this was the final end of year position and not the 'near actual' financial position as stated on the report cover sheet. The Committee noted that the Education & Children Department's revenue budget was reporting a net overspend of £735,000 for the year whilst the capital programme showed a variance of -£6,154,000 against the 2015/16 approved budget. There were also no departmental reserves left for the 2016/17 year.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Members expressed concern at the costs associated with school-based early voluntary retirement and redundancies and as these were likely to continue and increase, it was asked whether the Department was able to predict what the financial impact was likely to be over the next twelve months and if there was dialogue between the Authority and schools on this matter. The Group Accountant stated that based on the business cases already received, the Department was anticipating an overspend of approximately £500,000 for 2016/17. The Committee was informed that changes to the process were being made to ensure that the system was clearer and that the Authority worked with schools from the onset to plan retirement applications and make use of redeployment opportunities for staff facing redundancy.

In light of the on-going financial pressure faced by schools, the Chair suggested that the Executive Board be asked to consider allocating more funding for the Education & Children Department to help alleviate the financial pressures currently being experienced. The Committee agreed to the proposal.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

7.1 The report be received.

7.2 The Executive Board be asked to consider allocating more funding for the Education & Children Department to help alleviate the financial pressures currently being experienced.

8. CARMARTHENSHIRE'S WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGY – 2016/17 CONSULTATION UPDATE

The Committee considered the 2015 update of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) which was originally approved by the Welsh Government in September 2014. The Committee was reminded that local authorities were required to prepare and submit a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for approval or modification by Welsh Ministers and that these were to be reviewed on an annual basis. Members noted that there had not been any changes to the original seven outcomes other than to integrate the needs of the local economy into the Plan.

The Committee was informed that in complying with the requirement of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013 to review its Plan annually (i.e. a review of progress against the targets set out in the Plan), there had been some confusion in respect to the requirement to consult on the revised WESP. Welsh Government officials had subsequently advised that the revised Plan was also required to be subject to consultation and therefore, the Authority undertook a period of consultation between the 29th March and 12th May 2016. A total of 16 responses were received and analysis was included in the attached report.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the revised Plan:

Progress in relation to meeting the targets outlined in the original Plan was welcomed but in light of the many challenging targets and tight timescales, it was asked how much further progress could be achieved. The Director of Education & Children's Services welcomed the comment and acknowledged that the targets were indeed challenging and often influenced by other factors. For instance, changing school language categories required the Authority to adhere to statutory processes and these often took place over a longer period of time. He also added that there were 10 dual-stream schools in Carmarthenshire and not 6 as outlined in the Action Plan (Section 2).

It was suggested that in general, WESP progress across Wales had been quite disappointing and that the requirement for another strategy and the WESP's format might have contributed to the slow response by other local authorities in developing their own plans. It was proposed that the Executive Board Member (Education & Children) lobby the newly established Welsh Government and request that WESPs be incorporated into local authorities' existing corporate strategies, rather than being considered as stand-alone documents. The Committee agreed to this proposal.

Reference was made to the Authority's Language Centres and that during the Committee's school visits earlier that week, a head teacher had suggested to members that this service was not sufficient to support learners. It was also suggested that the language stations project should ensure that not only was Welsh history taught but that learners were also taught about the struggle that the Welsh language had faced over the years. The Challenge Advisor informed the Committee that officers were continuing to consider other models used in other counties by

modifying the Carmarthenshire set-up to be more flexible and adaptable to local challenges. One current option was to encourage schools to work in local clusters due to the geographical nature of the county. However, costs of associated with the service (e.g. transport) were a problem and adopting the Ceredigion / Gwynedd models would require significant investment. She also confirmed that the history of the Welsh language was included in the language stations project.

In response to a question on the development of a booklet to promote the benefits of bilingualism, the Challenge Advisor confirmed that these had been published and were available on the County Council's website.

Reference was made to the Census Working Group which had recommended that 'the County Council ensured that Welsh medium primary schools were part of a secondary school family that could provide appropriate linguistic continuum from the primary sector to KS3 and KS4'. However, it was suggested that this was still not possible for some pupils leaving Welsh-medium primary schools and moving to secondary schools in the Llanelli area. The Challenge Advisor noted that the Plan 'expected' rather than 'demanded' that secondary schools offered this provision. This had been a challenge and following an initial decrease in the number of pupils entering Welsh streams, this number had been increased once more. In response to a further comment, the Challenge Advisor informed the Committee that much work had been undertaken with pupils and parents and that the Schools Language Charter had been particularly successful and activities related to this were popular amongst younger aged children.

It was asked whether schools with empty places could change their age categories to 3-11 from 4-11 in order to boost numbers. The Director of Education & Children's Services stated that officers would welcome this but that unfortunately, it was not possible in all schools with building and financial constraints being the main two barriers. The schools that were currently having their age categories changed were located in areas that were in receipt of national programmes such as Flying Start.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 8.1 The revised Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan be endorsed for consideration by the Executive Board.
- 8.2 That the Executive Board Member (Education & Children) be requested to lobby the Welsh Government and request that WESPs be incorporated into local authorities' existing corporate strategies, rather than being considered as stand-alone documents.

9. MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME (MEP) – PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE LANGUAGE CATEGORY OF YSGOL BRO MYRDDIN FROM BILINGUAL (2A) TO WELSH-MEDIUM (WM)

Councillor P. Hughes-Griffiths had earlier declared that he is a governor at Ysgol Bro Myrddin and that whilst he could take part and vote, he would not be contributing to discussions during consideration of this item.

The Committee considered the proposal to change the language category of Ysgol Bro Myrddin from Bilingual (2A) to Welsh-medium (WM) following the approval of the County Council in March 2016, for the publication of the Statutory Notice. The

notice had provided objectors with 28 days in which to forward their objections in writing to the Council. The Statutory Notice period ended on 10th May 2016 and a total of 2 objections were received.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the proposal:

Disappointment was expressed that the processes that were required to be followed in order to enable schools to change their language categories, appeared to be a hindrance rather than helpful. It was suggested that whilst the Welsh Government appeared to support the principle of allowing schools to progress along the language continuum, their own processes were actually designed to frustrate the process at the same time. It was suggested that the County Council, via the Executive Board, be asked to lobby the Welsh Government and request that it simplify the process required for changing school language categories, thus making it easier for schools to move along the Welsh language continuum. The Committee agreed to the proposal.

The Committee **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that:

- 9.1 The report be received.
- 9.2 It be recommended to the Executive Board that it proceeds with the proposal to change the language category of Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin from Bilingual 2A to Welsh-medium and implement the proposal as detailed in the Statutory Notice, as from 1st September 2016.
- 9.3 The Executive Board be asked to recommend to County Council that it lobby the Welsh Government and request it to simplify the process required for changing school language categories, thus making it easier for schools to move along the Welsh language continuum and to change their language categories to Welsh-medium.

10. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT (2015/16) AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN (2016/17)

The Committee considered the First Year's progress report on the Council's Corporate Strategy 2015-20 as well as the Council's Annual Report (2015/16) and Improvement Plan (2016/17). The Committee noted that annual reporting was one of the prime opportunities for review, monitoring and reflection and an opportunity for the authority to capture its on-going activity around meeting its general and specific duties. It also noted that the Council was required by law to publish an Improvement Plan as soon as it was reasonably practicable after the start of the financial year (i.e. April 1st) and also publish an Annual Report on past performance by the end of October each year.

The Committee **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to endorse the Council's draft Annual Report 2015/16 and Improvement Plan 2016/17.

11. END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT – 1ST APRIL 2015 TO 31ST MARCH 2016

The Committee received, for consideration, the End of Year Performance Management Report for the services within its remit, for the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. The report included:

- Heads of Service Overview of Performance
- Improvement Plan Monitoring – Actions and Performance Measures
- Complaints and Compliments Monitoring

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

In response to a question regarding the ERW (Education through Regional Working) Consortium, the Head of Learner Programmes informed the Committee that it was currently being inspected by ESTYN, as had the other three Welsh education consortiums in South, East and North Wales.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

12. 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.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

SIGNED: _____ (Chair)

DATE: _____