

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 8 July 2021

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair)

Councillors:

S.M. Allen, L.R. Bowen, K.V. Broom, J.M. Charles (in place of D.T. Williams), R. James (in place of B. Thomas), J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E.M.J.G. Schiavone, E.G. Thomas a M. Stephens

Co-Opted Members:

A. Enoch – Parent Governor
V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance:

Councillor G. Davies – Executive Board Member for Education and Children

The following Officers were in attendance:

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services
J. Morgan, Director of Community Services
S. Davies, Head of Access to Education
A. Rees, Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing
A Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
J.G. Buck, Performance & Information Officer
E. Forsyth, Principal Challenge Advisor
C.S. Griffiths, Welsh Language Development Manager
N. Thomas, Service Manager
N. Jackman, Service Manager
S. Sauro, Performance, Analysis & Systems Manager
R. James, Performance Planning & Business Officer
R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 12.55 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Thomas and D.T. Williams.

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

| Councillor | Minute Item(s) | Nature of Interest |
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| Cllr. Vera Kenny | 10 | Noreen Jackman is Cllr's. daughter. |
| Cllr. Darren Price | 9 | Prejudicial interest as wife is a Lecturer at UWTSD. |

There were no declarations of party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATUTORY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SOCIAL CARE SERVICES IN CARMARTHENSHIRE 2020/21

The committee considered a report by the Director of Social Services on the performance of Social Care Services in the county setting out its challenges of an unprecedented year due to COVID-19 and relates to performance for the year 2020-21. Members were informed that there was a statutory requirement for the Director of Social Services to report annually on delivery and performance, as well as plans for the improvement of the whole range of social services.

The Executive Board Member for Education advised that the department is under a lot of pressure due to increase in demand for help where Children's Services have proved very effective and have prioritised via the Regional Partnership Board arrangement. The Social Work teams and day services staff have remained in contact with carers and provided support when necessary; many of the staff have either achieved or are undertaking the Investors in Carers Award which is an acknowledge of the support provided to carers and all Social Work teams have been identified Carers Champions.

The Regional Safeguarding Board and associated subgroups have continued to meet virtually; being part of a Regional Multi Agency Covid response group which met weekly having assurance regarding safeguarding responses during the pandemic and have continued to work within the new All Wales Adult Protection Procedures and Carmarthenshire has led on several developments across the region including the development of a Covid Threshold document and training and are well prepared for the implementation of the new Liberty Protection Safeguards in 2022.

Following publication of the report, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and the Welsh Government will complete their analysis and review of the report. There will be a formal meeting with CIW in October to discuss their analysis and proposed plan. This will be followed by an Annual Letter to Council in late November/early December, confirming their analysis and inspection plan. The process will link in closely with the Wales Programme for Improvement and the Annual Letter from the Wales Audit Office.

Questions and observations raised:-

- Clarity was sought on the provision of joint disability service for children, young people aged 0-25 and their families based on need and not on age where it appears that provision during Summer holidays are predominantly in the Heol

Goffa, Llanelli area and not shared across the north and east of the county. Comprehensive clarification has since been provided on this issue which relates to costs as children with complex needs have extra pressure. The Director of Education and Children advised that there are other activities in the pipeline whereby Welsh Government have given additional funding of £270k and are currently working with many partners to provide activities across Carmarthenshire and the programme is currently being finalised.

- Asked who is present at the Pod Meetings? The Director of Community Services advised that it is an important element on how the service operates and the Service Manager advised that each pod is formed by 3 x Social Workers, psychologists and lead by a Team Manager with a Child and Family Practitioner within looking at how to manage behaviours with an Unit Co-ordinator recording minutes with each case discussed every 6 weeks.
- Asked about Home Education and how are the children not educated at home reached in Carmarthenshire. The Director of Education advised that Welsh Government have claimed that they are going to legislate over this and get the children to be registered but there is no statutory obligation to do this.
- The figures on the report were questioned about NEETs and further information was sought. The Director of Community Services advised that there is evidence to support this.

RESOLVED that:

- The Director of Community Services arrange for the Care Leavers Data to be made available to the members.
- The Authority write to the new Minister at Welsh Government in relation to Home Education.
- The report be received.

5. CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The Committee considered a report with an update on the wellbeing objectives relevant to Education and Children Scrutiny. The report concluded that 2020/21 was a year like no other due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The vast majority of the Council's services had to adapt and change, with many being shut down completely for long periods of the year. For this reason, it is not possible for the 2020-21 Annual Report to act as a progress report on previous performance or as a comparator with other local authorities. The report reflects the actions the Council had to take to support its residents, communities and businesses through the pandemic. With many staff being redeployed to assist in the pandemic response and many set to work to aid recovery the Council's priorities had to shift significantly to face the challenges presented by the pandemic

The Deputy Leader and the Executive Board Member for Education and Children's Services presented the committee with the report detailing the importance of giving every child the best start in life; improving their early life experiences; helping them live healthy lifestyles, support and improve progress, achievement for all learners and to ensure all young people are in Education, Employment or Training (EET) following productive learning and career pathways.

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deployed to assist in the pandemic response and many set to work to aid recovery the Council's priorities had to shift significantly to face the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Wellbeing objectives were measured by success and in May, 2020 the Future Generations Commissioner published the [Future Generation Report 2020](#) on the progress of the Act over the last 5 years and made a number of recommendations for public bodies, which are considered as part of the future service planning and development.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The Committee were presented the report which has been prepared in order to comply with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution which states that a Scrutiny Committee must "Prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committee's activities over the previous year." The report provides an overview of the Community Scrutiny Committee's work during the 2020/21 municipal year

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that subject to change in attendance of 2 x Councillors that the report be received.

7. INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT (TASK & FINISH)

The Committee were presented with an Interim Recommendations report in order to feed into the department's plans on how we are going to consult being mindful that urgent solutions are required from Welsh Government on school categorisation.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:-

- the Interim Recommendations Report go to Executive Board for approval
- the report be received.

8. EDUCATION RECOVERY PLAN "STEPPING FORWARD"

The Committee were presented with a report giving an overview of the Education Department's Covid response and how findings are shaping strategic plans for moving forward ensuring that schools are being supported to meet the needs of vulnerable learners.

The Executive Board member for Education advised that the aim of the report is to confirm that schools meets the support on vulnerable learners and its importance that the department recognise the gaps and the need to adapt to change with safeguarding education and health being important factors.

The Director of Education and Children advised that this report will be utilised with the Corporate Management Team and the Executive Board to give a reflection on where we are currently.

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

- Asked how we monitor the wellbeing and standards of education of children taught at home and the ones that move around regularly. The Director of Education and Children advised the team has expanded and now have more qualified officers visiting families and having engagement with them – parents can follow any curriculum and learning path that they want – advice and guidance is given and with the funding that's been received from Welsh Government they can be supported giving them access to examinations.
- Asked if an extensive exit is conducted with Headteachers to establish why their retiring given that there is pressure on leadership at schools with all systematic changes occurring? The Director of Education and Children advised that there is a combination of reasons; albeit, health, family, wellbeing.
- Asked about the Wales' new curriculum being mandatory in secondary schools a year later than planned with no delay for primary schools. The Director of Education and Children advised that the Education Minister has advised that secondary schools could introduce it later due to Covid challenges and this will be discussed in a Headteacher's meeting scheduled for w/c 12th July, 2021. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that the new curriculum is currently being trialled and envisage that all schools in Carmarthenshire will embark.
- Concerns on the workload of Headteachers. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services advised that they've relaxed the workload e.g. Estyn inspections have been delayed until Spring 2022, testing aid assessment process and reports to parents.
- Asked about the levels of progression on Vulnerable Learners. The Head of Education and Inclusion advised that some schools requested further support on vulnerable learners and worked closely with Headteachers to look at most effective methods in wellbeing with officers across the department collated advice and guidance to schools.
- Clarity was sought on the drop in attendance in secondary schools. The Head of Education and Inclusion service advised that he writes to schools every Friday and the correspondence reminds them of the legal requirement to complete the register in a timely manner; to note that coding has been an issue on the register i.e. if their isolating or part of a bubble but new coding will be introduced in September, 2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:-

- The report go to Executive Board and CMT
- that the report be received.

9. WELSH IN EDUCATION PLAN (WESP)

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

The Committee were presented with the first draft of the new 10 year WESP prior to formal public consultation (Autumn Term 2021)

The Executive Board member for Education advised that the aim is to reach 1m welsh speakers by 2050 to enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive.

The new plan will be introduced in September, 2022.

Welsh Government have made it clear that it is mandatory that Welsh is mandatory from 3 years old and English from 7 years old.

The Head of Curriculum & Wellbeing presented the Committee with a powerpoint presentation on how to promote parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes in Welsh education, expand the Welsh Language early years provision, expand the Pupil Immersion Programme and introduce a pilot project which will incentivise young Welsh speakers to return from universities to help teach Welsh in schools with bilingualism, multilingualism and plurilingualism.

Building Wesp around Carmarthenshire following 7 points to strengthen its purpose:

- More nursery children (aged 3) following their teaching of Welsh-medium education
- More reception children (aged 5) following their teaching through the medium of Welsh
- More children improving language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another (progression progress)
- More learners to study for qualifications in Welsh as a subject and subjects through the medium of Welsh
- More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in schools
- Increase provision for learners with ALN, in line with the new ALN Act
- Increase the number of teachers able to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh

It was noted that 2 x Headteacher meetings had been held and feedback has been good working together in developing Wesp with the objective that all children are bilingual by the age of 11 and, with Welsh Immersion methodology in Foundation Phase, that children become adeptly bilingual by the age of 7.

Questions and observations raised:-

- Asked if jobs are safe? The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing confirmed that redundancies are not to be associated with this agenda and staff will be supported to develop professionally by engaging in a comprehensive and flexible training programme.
- Asked to expand on the Headteacher meetings; the Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that in the English Medium session there was discussion around the step by step approach to taking on stakeholder comments; discussed staff capacity, training and programmes for governors planned for the Autumn and consultation with communities of the schools and discussions on how to support Headteachers for more training. Welsh medium School Headteachers talked about: having a pilot in Carmarthenshire to promote the recruitment of more teachers; Welsh medium vocational paths; multilingualism; setting the bar high to have 3 languages in place for learners. There is willingness amongst the Headteachers of both Welsh and English Stream but some had expressed reservations on how to put it into action but, overall, officers felt they had benefitted from detailed and appropriate discussions with them as Wesp develops further into the autumn, with more opportunities to engage with Heads and Governors.

- Observation made that as part of the journey it's important to teach parents and their children so that they understand the process and they are part of the journey with us and the need to do a lot of work with the parents. The Chair advised that there is a communication plan in place when developing this Wesp and are engaging with non-statutory organisations.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

10. CHILDREN'S SERVICES (INCREASED REFERRAL RATES)

[NOTE: Councillor V. Kenny had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee were presented with a report to look at the increase in contacts and referrals within Children's Services advising of the elevated levels of activity within the service and the implications should this pattern continue.

The Executive Board member for Education advised that CRT covers the whole of Carmarthenshire providing a single point of contact for anyone who has concerns over a child's welfare. The Team deal with all new contacts and referrals into Children's Services which has provided a more consistent approach to decision-making. As well as responding to concerns, the team also provides information, advice and support to children, families, members of the public, professionals and other agencies.

Since the pandemic contact and referrals have gradually increased throughout the year with 141 more referrals than in 2020 and staffing issues.

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

- Concern was raised over staffing within the team. The Service Manager advised that staffing has been and is a challenge with sickness and have managed to secure 1 new staff member but not reaped the benefits due to ongoing staff shortage but have been fortunate to have had staff drafted in from preventative service to help catch up with the back log. The Director of Education and Children advised that this team does require specific skills In order to deal with the demands and need a range of expertise and has to be very experienced people brought in from other teams to help support and are currently considering having an apprenticeship scheme in the department so they can support those teams in an effective way
- Clarity was sought on the 9 Stage 1 complaints received in relation to Children's Services; 5 only of which were upheld. The Service Manager made it clear that none of the complaints were in relation to not being able to get hold of the team and that whenever a complaint is dealt with they are put on an Action Plan to learn from.
- Asked if CRT are in contact with schools to promote opportunities that Carmarthenshire County Council has for employing people. The Director of Education and Children has had conversations with schools on how to engage and share these opportunities to show the young people the range of job prospect within the County Council with the developments of the new curriculum giving an opportunity to work with schools sharing this information in choosing the correct career path for the future.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:-

- The report goes before CMT and Executive Board due to concerns around staffing to assess the team and pressures their under.
- the report be received.

11. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

There were none.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

12. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 6th October, 2021 subsequent to the following inclusions in the Impact of Mental Health Report on

- Headteacher and Leader perspective
- Assessment of Mental Health of teachers and pupils and what support there is moving forward

13. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 11TH JUNE, 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11th June, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE