

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 23RD DECEMBER, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price [Chair]

Councillors:

S. Allen, K. Broom, S. Davies, R. James, J. Jenkins, D. Jones, B. Jones, G. Jones, J. Lewis, E. Schiavone, E. Thomas and G. Thomas (substitute for D. Williams)

Co-opted Members:

A. Enoch	-	Parent Governor
F. Healey-Benson	-	Parent Governor
V. Kenny	-	Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance:

Councillor G. Davies - Cabinet Member for Education & Children

The following Officers were in attendance:

G. Morgans – Director of Education & Children’s Services
S. Davies – Head of Access to Education
S. Smith – Head of Children’s Services
G. Adams – Principal Youth Support Services Manager
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer [Note Taker]
E. Bryer - Democratic Services Officer
S. Hendy – Member Support Officer [Webcasting]
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator

Virtual Meeting : 10.00 am - 11.55 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Bowen and D. Williams.

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

There were no declarations of personal interest including any party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. WORKING WITH THOSE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (NEET)

The Committee received a report which provided an overview and update on the work being undertaken with those not in education, employment or training (NEET). The report details of service delivery which included the following:-

- Welsh Government and UK objectives in this area of work;
- Locally determined objectives, partnership working and performance;
- Regional developments;
- Risks and challenges.

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

- Reference was made to the impact of covid and officers were asked if we will be able to catch up with the missed NEET opportunities and that we will be able to get back on target. The Director informed the Committee that the service has continued to work throughout the pandemic and moved back to holding face to face meetings quite quickly after the onset of the pandemic. The Principal Youth Support Services Manager added that school based youth workers are key to this work and they were back in schools at the earliest possible opportunity. A lot of work has been done within the department to ensure that risk assessments and safe working practices were in place to enable staff to continue to work safely and responsibly. She added that, as a service, they do not need to catch up as they have continued to work throughout the pandemic;
- Reference was made to the Young Person's Guarantee and concern was expressed over the lack of progress on this initiative due to Welsh Government internal resource issues and an assurance was sought that these issues will be sorted out as it was unfair that our young people should lose out on opportunities because of the Welsh Government. The Principal Youth Support Services Manager informed the Committee that this initiative was very much linked to the review of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, an update report on which was expected in the new year;
- As Local Authorities have to bid for Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) money every year, officers were asked how much uncertainty that creates and also whether all Local Authorities have to compete against each other for this money and if it is not forthcoming then what do we do. Reference was also made to the fact that a lot of the funding available is in the form of short term grants and officers were asked if any decisions are likely on a national level to create a more sustainable long-term system. The Director explained that a number of the programmes are short term, 3 year programmes. He agreed that it was difficult because during that period teams become well established but when the funding comes to an end, the teams have to be disbanded. The Principal Youth Support Services Manager added that there is a concern that each Local Authority and the third sector will submit bids which will lead to some areas missing out which would be a great concern. As a County Council we need to look at how we can best access that funding in order to improve outcomes going into the future. The Committee was assured that this issue was being monitored closely;
- Disappointment was expressed at the fact that the Local Authority has to bid for this money because we are going to have a cohort of youngsters every year who fall into this category and it was felt that this funding should be part of the core support available. It was suggested that the Committee write to Welsh Government to suggest that the Young Persons' Guarantee becomes part of the core funding;
- Reference was made to self-reporting and specifically those students who

do not turn up for a college course and officers were asked who is responsible for monitoring such instances and whether they are reported to Careers Wales. The Principal Youth Support Services Manager informed the Committee that officers receive a snapshot of data from Careers Wales in relation to 16-19 year olds on a monthly basis. Vulnerability Assessment meetings in school are also helpful in terms of data verification. She assured the Committee that officers do what they can reasonably do to ensure that the data is accurate.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 4.1 that the report be received;**
- 4.2 that a letter be sent from the Committee to the Welsh Government conveying the Committee's concerns regarding funding and requesting that a more sustainable, long term system be introduced.**

5. FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES: EDUCATION AND CHILDREN SERVICES

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of how the Education and Children's Services Department is delivering preventative support for families across our county. The report detailed the challenges facing the preventative services and how these are being addressed. The report also referenced the emerging needs of families, demands on services from a family support/preventative service perspective.

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

- Concern was expressed over the fact that different data collection systems are used throughout the Authority and officers were asked what is preventing all services from using the same system. The Head of Children's Services informed the Committee that the Authority is trying to move towards achieving this, however, it was a difficult and complex task because each service has specific data collection requirements;
- Concern was expressed over the impact of Flying Start on the Child Care Offer as access to assistance is based on the individual's post code and officers were asked if the Child Care Offer could be extended to include all children within the ward. The Head of Children's Services explained that in all circumstances officers make every effort not to split communities, however, officers were restricted in what they are able to do in terms of outreach because of the terms of the grant. The Director referred to the recent extension by the WG of the Child Care Offer to all 2 year olds and officers were currently working with officials on the extension of that initiative. The Head of Children's Services assured the Committee that no impact was anticipated on Flying Start;
- Reference was made to the impact of the covid pandemic on staff and the resultant tired workforce and officers were asked if there were many staff off work in the division. The Head of Children's Services advised that the pandemic has had an impact and staff were currently dealing with some very complex situations and the health and wellbeing of staff was paramount. He pointed out that one of the main problems was the inability to fill vacant posts. He stressed that the pressure on the service cannot be

underestimated. He added that they were fortunate to have great staff who do an amazing job;

- Reference was made to the 20% reduction in referrals and officers were asked if, consequently, they anticipated a large increase in the number of referrals going forward. The Head of Children's Services explained that the inability to meet with families due to covid inevitably led to that reduction and as officers are now able to undertake visits he was confident that we will see the rates rise again. Families desperately need that support and once they know that it is available again they will take advantage of it;
- Asked how many referrals come from schools and how many come from families, the Director explained that the data contained in the report relates specifically to Families First. The Head of Children's Services added that a lot of referrals from Teams Around the Family (TAF) come from schools, however, they are not always recorded in that way.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP DRAFT FINAL REPORT 2020/21: SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION PROCESS

At its meeting held on the 21st April, 2021 the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Task & Finish Group to undertake a review of the current consultation process for school organisation changes, including changes in linguistic provision and closure of schools.

Following the consideration of a range of evidence over a series of meetings held between May and November 2021 the Task & Finish Group had formulated a draft final report and recommendations. The Committee was asked to endorse these recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet.

The following observation was raised on the report:-

- Whilst acknowledging and appreciating the work of the Task & Finish Group, concern was expressed that some issues such as change of language medium at a school should not be expedited. The Chair explained that it was being proposed that an informal consultation and a formal consultation stage be undertaken which would provide everyone with adequate opportunity to put forward any observations/objections;

RESOLVED that the Task & Finish Group draft final report 2020/21 on the School Organisation Consultation Process and the recommendations contained therein be endorsed for consideration by the Cabinet.

7. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting of the Committee to be held on 27th January, 2022.

The Chair informed the Committee that a referral had been received from the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee requesting that the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee look into the slippage in the MEP Programme. He advised the

Committee that the referral would be considered at the next meeting in the context of discussion on the budget consultation report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next meeting be noted.

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 30TH NOVEMBER 2021

A point was raised with regards to the detail of the minutes. The Chair explained that it was not possible to record every point made during a meeting, but that a full recording of all webcast council meetings is available on the council's website.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30th November, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE