

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 16 MARCH 2022

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair)

Councillors:

S.M. Allen, L.R. Bowen, K.V. Broom, J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E. Morgan (In place of S.L. Davies), E.M.J.G. Schiavone, E.G. Thomas and D.T. Williams

Co-opted Members:

A. Enoch - Parent Governor
F. Healey-Benson - Parent Governor
V. Kenny - Roman Catholic Church Representative
Rev. D Richards - Church in Wales Representative

School Representatives for Queen Elizabeth High School:

Mr D. Williams - Headteacher
Mrs L. Jones - Assistant Headteacher, Inclusion & Wellbeing
Mrs L. Thomas - Assistant Headteacher, Canofan Elfed
Mrs V. Brook - Additional Learning Needs Coordinator

PARTNERIAETH Representative in attendance:

Mr I. Altman - PARTNERIAETH Lead Officer

The following Officers were in attendance:

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services
S. Davies, Head of Access to Education
A Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
S. Smith, Head of Children's Services
E. Forsyth, Interim Head of School Improvement, Curriculum and Wellbeing
N. Jackman, Service Manager
R. Williams, Additional Needs Provision Manager
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer [Webcasting]
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer [Note taker]

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 1.08 pm

[Note:

- At 12:55pm the Committee's attention was drawn to Council Procedure Rule (CPR) 9 – Duration of Meeting and, as the meeting would have been underway for three hours at 1:00pm, it was resolved to suspend standing orders, in accordance with CPR 23.1, to enable the Committee to complete the remaining business on the agenda.]

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Davies and R. James. Furthermore, the Chair reported that Cllr G. Davies, Cabinet Member for Education and Children would not be in attendance at the meeting.

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

Attendee	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
E. Schiavone	5	Family member is an employee of PARTNERIAETH.
V. Kenny	6	Daughter is an employee within the Children's Services division.

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rules.

4. SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT SESSION

In accordance with the School Engagement Programme agreed by Committee at its meeting on 30th November 2021, a report was presented to members which detailed the school preparedness for, and the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act.

The Committee was provided with an overview of the array of measures taken by the Authority to prepare for the introduction of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system. In this regard, a synopsis of the engagement undertaken with schools to date was provided to the Committee in order to facilitate the delivery of a fully inclusive education system for learners in Carmarthenshire, and which would ensure that the needs of learners are identified early and addressed quickly, and where all learners are supported to reach their potential.

The Committee then received a presentation from the school representatives which focussed upon the school's transition to the new system which aimed to provide a fair and inclusive educational structure and derive improved outcomes for children and young people with ALN. The key points covered within the presentation included:

- The ALN system sought to transform the separate approaches for special educational needs to create a unified system for supporting learners from 0 to 25years.
- The cross-cutting education reform principles emanating from National guidelines and regulations enabled opportunities for change which aimed to provide:
 - equality of access;
 - personalised 'person centred' learning;
 - a focus on wellbeing, with high quality, balanced and structured teaching and meaningful assessment, with a move away from statistics;
 - inclusive school ethos to ensure a safe, supportive, stimulating learning environment;
 - a culture of collaboration.

- The ALN system would be underpinned by a mandatory ALN Code which placed the views, wishes and feelings of learners at the heart of the process of planning the support required, which would subsequently enable them to learn effectively and achieve their full potential.
- A phased approach would be taken to replace Statements of Special Educational Needs with Individual Development Plans (IDPs) which would set out a description of a child or young person's ALN.
- The concept of good universal teaching, in addition to bespoke interventions, and a need to embrace the new curriculum and strategies to support every pupil was considered to be of paramount importance to meet the requirements of the Act.
- The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) would play a key strategic role in every school.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

In response to a query regarding the role of parents and guardians in the development of IDPs, the School Representatives detailed the communication methods utilised to raise awareness of the new system. The Committee was informed that parents and guardians were placed at the heart of the process, by way of effective and regular communication with the school, in order to ensure appropriate provisions and adjustments to support the needs of children and young people with ALN. The Committee was assured to note that the process was working well to date, with parents and guardians taking an active role in the development of IDPs. The Director of Education and Children's Services emphasised that the new system was based upon a partnership approach which promoted an open and constructive relationship between schools and parents/guardians. In this regard, the Additional Needs Provision Manager referred to the active programme of engagement to provide appropriate parental/guardian support.

In response to a query regarding the number of pupils with IDPs, the Director of Education and Children's Services explained that the ALN transformation formed part of a suite of educational reform within Wales, whereby robust and universal whole-class teaching would have a direct bearing on the Additional Learning Provision required by pupils with ALN.

Clarification was sought on the mechanisms in place to support more able and talented pupils within the school, together with the challenges experienced by teachers to provide differentiated and bespoke programmes of study for pupils. The School Representatives acknowledged the range of abilities within the school and provided assurances that appropriate support was provided by way of programmes and plans, to meet the needs of all groups of learners. In this regard, the School Representatives were pleased to report that the school curriculum was reviewed and adapted as required; furthermore, the teachers, with valuable input from Teaching Assistants, catered for the needs of pupils by way of robust universal teaching.

In response to a query regarding pupil integration between the school's mainstream and the Specialist Inclusion Centre (Canolfan Elfed), the School Representatives reported that Canolfan Elfed had received a National accolade at the Pearson Teaching Awards in recognition of the excellent range of inclusive online learning resources for pupils during the coronavirus pandemic.

A query was raised in respect of the funding formula for ALN, and whether this was considered adequate to meet the requirements of the Act. The Director of Education and Children's Services and the Additional Needs Provision Manager reported that following consultation with schools and representatives of the Budgetary Forum, the allocation of the additional £2m funding for 2022/23 would be finalised imminently. It was explained that the future savings derived from the discontinuation of Statements of Special Educational Needs would be fed back into the system and provide schools with flexibility regarding the use of funding; however, due to the phased programme of the ALN transformation, it was recognised that the savings would not be realised for a further three years.

Reference was made to the music curriculum for ALN whereby the Additional Needs Provision Manager was pleased to report that a Welsh Government funding had been made available for schools by way of the Adapted Musical Instruments grant.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. UPDATE ON PARTNERIAETH

[NOTE: Cllr E. Schiavone having earlier declared an interest in this item remained in the meeting for its consideration].

The Committee received for consideration a report which set out the collaborative arrangements for the establishment of 'PARTNERIAETH', a regional consortium designed to promote excellence, and which served the schools within Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Swansea.

The Committee thereupon received a presentation from the Lead Officer of PARTNERIAETH, which detailed the staffing structure, priorities, functions and funding mechanisms required to deliver its aims and objectives. It was highlighted that the regional consortium was based on a vision of a partnership working on behalf of the respective Local Authorities and which contributed to the improvement in the performance of the schools within the consortium and the education of children and young people. Committee's attention was drawn to the business plan for 2022/23, which demonstrated how PARTNERIAETH would support each Local Authority priorities, facilitated by dedicated Senior Strategic Advisors and which was also aligned to National priorities.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

A concern was raised that the new regional consortium may have a limited positive impact on schools and therefore would not improve upon the performance of the previous 'ERW' regime, particularly in light of the reduced staffing structure which equated to 26.8 full-time posts.

Assurances was provided to the Committee that the PARTNERIAETH consortium focussed upon a cohesive partnership approach, with strong lines of communication and performance monitoring to address the needs of schools. As an example, a leadership programme was being developed in accordance with the Authority's priority area in respect of leadership skills.

In response to a query, the Lead Officer for PARTNERIAETH clarified that regular scrutiny would be undertaken to monitor and review the delivery of the consortium's aims and objectives. An emphasis was placed on collaboration as a key area of strength, whereby the system was developed and structured on a partnership basis.

Reference was made to the staffing structure whereby a member queried whether further resource was required to deliver a high-quality level of support akin to the sterling service provided by the Challenge Advisors. The Director of Education and Children's Services confirmed that the staffing structure was deemed appropriate to meet the aims and objectives of the consortium and would be periodically reviewed in accordance with succession planning protocols to ensure that the skillset of employees addressed support requirements.

In response to concerns raised regarding duplication of work, it was explained that co-construction, with clear lines of communication, was a key priority, which would enable the utilisation of identified skillsets within the consortium to provide an improved provision to schools.

A member highlighted that the differing priorities across the Authorities within the consortium could potentially lead to some Authorities drawing upon more resources and support than others and enquired how this imbalance would be redressed. The Director of Education and Children's Services recognised that pressures from different areas would emerge at different times, however it was emphasised that regular and clear communication would be maintained at Director level to ensure that resources were deployed to meet the needs of the consortia, with a scrutiny function to ensure that an equal share of services was utilised amongst partners. It was also highlighted to members that PARTNERIAETH was a smaller entity with robust management processes to ensure that additional requests from external Authorities would not be accepted if they were deemed to be to the detriment of the consortia.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. CONTACTS & REFERRALS TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES

[NOTE: V. Kenny having earlier declared an interest in this item remained in the meeting for its consideration].

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Authority's position in respect of the contacts and referrals, pressures and demands within the Children's Services division.

Members were reminded that a report had been presented to the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 8th July 2021 and it was therefore considered timely to provide updated information on the current situation regarding the increase in the volume of work within the division; the challenges faced and the potential need for additional resource.

The report detailed the remit and structure of the Children's Services division and set out pertinent information to the Committee in respect of the staffing levels and the processes followed by the Central Referral Team (CRT), Assessment Team and Long-term Child Care Teams, to deal with cases. Furthermore, the report referred to the preventative services provided by the division, including the Flying Start and Families First initiatives and also referred to a new structure implemented in response to the increase in Electively Home Educated (EHE) children.

The report showed an increase in contacts since the onset of the pandemic, though it was noted that the number of referrals had decreased during 2021/22 which may have been attributable to the Preventative Services having reverted to the provision of face to face support with the easing of coronavirus restrictions.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

Committee referred to the ongoing National recruitment crisis and concerns were raised regarding the risks presented to the Authority in light of the difficulties in appointing social workers. The Service Manager provided members with a synopsis of the array of measures implemented to mitigate those risks, including an ongoing review which sought to enhance the salary of social workers to bring the rate of pay in line with other Authorities, and the recruitment of suitably qualified social workers from overseas. The Director of Education and Children's Services referred to the favourable working conditions within the Authority, therefore it was pleasing to note that the retention of employees was not an area for concern. Furthermore, the high-quality service maintained by the division, who were required to deal with complex issues, was commended by the Director of Education and Children's Services and Committee members.

DURATION OF MEETING

During the consideration of this item, the Committee's attention was drawn to Corporate Procedure Rule 9 – Duration of meeting and the fact the meeting had been underway for nearly three hours. It was therefore:

RESOLVED that Corporate Procedure Rule 9 be suspended to enable the remaining items on the agenda to be considered.

A concern was raised that not all Electively Home Educated (EHE) children had received a statutory annual home visit from the Authority. The Director of Education and Children's Services reported that additional funding had been provided by the Welsh Government which would address the increase in the level of demand placed on the division as a result of the rise in EHE children across Wales since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. SCRUTINY ACTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which detailed the progress achieved in relation to requests or referrals emerging from previous meetings during the 2021/22 municipal year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 28 JANUARY 2022

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28th January 2022 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE