

EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 24 MARCH 2023

PRESENT: Councillor (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

A.C. Jones	K.V. Broom	L. Davies	P. Hughes-Griffiths
S.L. Rees	E. Skinner		

Councillors (Virtually):

S.M. Allen	L.R. Bowen	L.M. Davies	B.W. Jones
D. Jones	M. Thomas	J.M. Charles	

Observer (In Person):

Councillor

Also in attendance:

Councillor

Also Present (In Person):

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services
A. Rees, Head of Strategy and Learner Support
E. Forsyth, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness
J. Dessent, Curriculum and Learning Network Manager
A. Carter, Senior Manager - TIC Schools
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer
M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

Also Present (Virtually):

S. Davies, Head of Access to Education
K. Evans, Assistant Democratic Services Officer
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 am - 12.05 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M.J.A. Lewis

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 (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. TRANSFORMATION, INNOVATION CHANGE (TIC), INCLUDING SCHOOL BUDGETS

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the Schools' Transformation Programme which had been introduced in 2017 to support schools in meeting significant financial challenges. The Committee was informed that the programme aimed to apply the Authority's core transformation principles of collaborative working and challenging existing practices to support schools in taking advantage of cost saving opportunities and service improvements, by way of a sustainable approach, across a wide range of activities, whilst also maintaining good pupil outcomes.

The Committee thereupon received a presentation which detailed the progress made to date in delivering the key priority areas, as follows:

- **Benchmarking** – curriculum and routine spend benchmarking exercise undertaken across secondary schools in 2022/23 to share good practice amongst schools.
- **Financial Efficiency Templates** – developed to support discussions with 9 schools in challenging financial positions.
- **Schools' Property 'Handyvan' Service** – a fully funded 2 year pilot underway across primary schools to enhance value for money.
- **Review of School Grounds' Maintenance Service** – a re-modelled Service Level Agreement (SLA) specification developed to provide greater flexibility for schools to derive efficiency savings with the provision of a bespoke, customer orientated approach.
- **Implement findings of schools SLA Review** – provision of a consistent approach with clear lines of communication to enable schools to deal with issues.
- **Administration** – Exploration of new approaches, using cluster-based models, to back office and support functions in primary schools.
- **Procurement** - Identification of savings opportunities, including economies of scale and Best Value approaches to procurement.
- **Communication**- regular engagement and sharing of good practice between schools.
- **School Suitability Surveys** – new template developed and ongoing surveys of all schools to support evidence base for School Improvement Plan (SIP) Review.
- **Rising 4s Policy** - deferred to 2024 pending further investigation of impact and implications.
- **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) funding models** - engagement with headteachers to develop new funding models to suit ALN Transformation.
- **School Catchment Area Review** to be undertaken in line with the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.

The issues/observations raised by the Committee were addressed as follows:-

Arising from the presentation and in response to a query, the School's Transformation and Change Manager clarified that the benchmarking exercise for 2022/23 had been completed for secondary schools only due to logistical issues,

the purpose of which was to provide schools with information to stimulate discussions and support decision making processes. Reference was made to a previous benchmarking exercise undertaken across primary schools which had been divided according to size groups. It was however acknowledged that such groupings would not necessarily be reflective of school cohorts, particularly due to the variable age of school estates, and this was an area which would be considered going forward. The Director of Education and Children's Services reported that a request would be made for Headteachers of secondary schools to circulate benchmarking information with school governors as a means of raising awareness of the information provided by the Transformation Programme. Furthermore, the School's Transformation and Change Manager would be invited to the next meeting of the Governors Forum to provide an overview of the work undertaken.

In response to a comment in respect of the organisation of primary schools and the perceived limited role of governing bodies, the Director of Education and Children's Services clarified that legislation prescribed the range of responsibilities for primary schools, by way of a delegated budget provision. Accordingly, the Service Level Agreement (SLA) model enabled schools to purchase services from different departments according to the area of expertise. The role of the Transformation Programme was therefore centred upon quality assurance, in addition to raising awareness of the SLAs and the services available to schools.

The School's Transformation and Change Manager, in response to a query regarding capacity to provide individual assistance to schools with budgetary matters and property maintenance services, explained that support was provided within the resources available and prioritised by the Local Authority.

In response to comments made regarding capacity to deliver the aims of the Schools Transformation Programme, The Director of Education and Children's Services was pleased to report that funding had been provided for the secondment of two headteachers to provide part-time support to drive forward the Schools Transformation Programme.

Reference was made to the Headteacher 'drop in' sessions introduced to communicate and engage with schools. The School's Transformation and Change Manager explained that weekly bulletins were circulated to schools to promote the areas for discussion, therefore attendance levels would depend upon the level of interest by schools in the focus area.

The School's Transformation and Change Manager, in response to a query, clarified that whilst the change in telephony system across schools would require an initial financial outlay, schools would then receive free calls, following which long-term financial savings would be derived.

The Director of Education and Children's Services conveyed his gratitude to the School's Transformation and Change Manager in respect of the positive work being developed to support the schools within Carmarthenshire.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. INTERIM REPORT ON POST 16 EDUCATION REVIEW

The Committee received for consideration an interim report on the Post-16 Education Review which had been undertaken in response to the aims of the Education and Children's Service Business Plan to create strong and inclusive schools and services committed to excellence, equity and well-being.

The report outlined the progress made to establish overarching Learner Entitlement Principles for evolving the post-16 landscape in Carmarthenshire and proposed a remodelled governance structure based upon the feedback provided by secondary schools in terms of what learners valued within their educational provision and experience. In this regard, a synopsis of the key themes which formed the basis of those principles was provided to the Committee as follows:

- Relationship, Belonging, Well-Being and Ethos;
- Improved Pathway Guidance and Skills for Independence and for success in academic, work and life.
- Equity through More Welsh Language options
- Equity through a wide range of options especially Vocational options

In considering the report, it was noted that the findings were directly in line with the recommendations emanating from Estyn's Review of the current 16-19 curriculum in Wales.

Reference was also made to the consultation workshop held on 10 February 2023 which provided Committee Members with an opportunity to provide feedback on the post-16 education review.

The issues/observations raised by the Committee were addressed as follows:-

Concerns were raised in respect of the ongoing National recruitment shortage of teachers which could prevent the Authority in meeting the demand for additional course options. The Head of Strategy and Learner Support referred to the recent Welsh Government announcement of £800,000 grant funding available across Wales, by way of a competitive bidding process, to recruit and train teachers for the provision Welsh-medium education. Furthermore, the Authority was exploring the further development of hybrid learning, including the 'e-sgol' initiative to ensure the provision of a range of subjects for learners across Carmarthenshire.

In recognition of the feedback provided by learners in respect of the value placed on relationships, an assurance was provided to the Committee that pupils would experience a mixed model of learning, with core subjects available face to face at a local level, and additional subjects being delivered mainly on-line, with an element of face to face learning provision, to provide a fulfilled experience to prepare young people for higher education, whilst also maintaining a sense of community and belonging.

Reference was made to a report published by the Welsh Language Commissioner which indicated a significant reduction in the number of newly qualified teachers able to deliver Welsh-medium education. The Head of

Strategy and Learner Support outlined the measures available to the Authority to build capacity by way of a comprehensive training system for teachers to learn Welsh or improve the confidence in delivering lessons through the medium of Welsh.

In response to concerns raised in respect of the high level of students not competing their Postgraduate Certificate in Education, the Head of Strategy and Learner Support endorsed the suggestion made to further explore the possible introduction of taster sessions, or workplace experience as Teaching Assistants for university students to further understand the requirements of the role in order to make informed career choices.

Following an enquiry regarding governance arrangements, the Director of Education and Children's Services clarified that following a review of meeting/group structures, the Education and Children's Services division had introduced specific focus groups to deal with various aspects of the business within the department, with appropriate representation to ensure effective input and the best outcomes for young people.

Reference was made to the STEM learning pathways, whereby it was suggested that the Youth Construction Ambassador Scheme for primary school pupils could be extended to secondary and higher education students as a means of providing practical learning and community engagement.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Interim Report on the Post-16 Education Review be endorsed and referred to the Cabinet for consideration.

6. DRAFT DIVISIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY PLANS 2023-24

The Committee received for consideration the Draft Divisional Service Delivery Plans relevant to the Education and Children's Services directorate for 2023/24 as follows:

- Education and Inclusion Services
- Access to Education
- Strategy & Learner Support
- Children's Services

The Draft Divisional Service Delivery Plans set out the strategic actions and measures to be implemented within each Division in order for the Council to progress with its well-being objectives, thematic priorities and service priorities. In this regard, the Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language referred to the consultation session held on 27 January 2023 which provided an opportunity for Members to provide feedback on the Corporate Strategy, which had subsequently been approved by the Council at its meeting on 01 March 2023.

In terms of the Children's Services Service Delivery Plan it was acknowledged that the elements relevant to the Education, Young People and Wels Language Scrutiny Committee related to the following areas:

- Schools Safeguarding and Attendance
- Educational Psychology
- Play Sufficiency Assessment

The issues/observations raised by the Committee were addressed as follows:-

In view of the new curriculum, a query was raised in respect of the support mechanisms in place to assist schools with the requirement to maintain systematic records to report progress and to enable reflective practice. The Director of Education and Children's Services explained that regular measures were in place for the current year pending Welsh Government's development of a new data environment. An assurance was provided that the Authority, together with Partneriaeth, were responding to the new requirements for schools to support and evidence the skills progression of individual learners in accordance with the 6 areas of learning and experience, and this system would be further strengthened and applied consistently amongst school clusters.

Members welcomed the importance placed on the music service for Carmarthenshire which was considered to be an integral service to the creative element of the new curriculum. The Director of Education and Children's Service emphasised that additional funding had been received to enable the Authority to continue with the service provision and it was recognised that Authority was in a positive position to have an in-house music provision which was responsive to the needs of pupils and communities. The Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness reported that the Authority led its own National plan for music to ensure that the learning offer for music reached as many learners as possible.

Furthermore, the Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness was delighted to report that the music service would be sharing digital advancements at the Bett Conference 2023 by way of showcasing a 'soundtrap' package which combined music and digital experiences developed in collaboration with schools in America. In response to a request, it was agreed that a demonstration and general update would be offered to members in due course.

In response to a query, it was confirmed to the Committee that the high number of headteachers scheduled to retire imminently presented a risk to the Authority, however the Director of Education and Children's Services was pleased to note that several high-quality appointments had been made recently in line with the Authority's succession planning arrangements and efforts were ongoing to promote Carmarthenshire Council as an employer of choice.

RESOLVED that the Draft Divisional Service Delivery Plans relevant to the Education and Children's Services directorate for 2023/24 be endorsed and referred to the Cabinet for consideration.

7. NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the scrutiny report pertaining to the Corporate Strategy.

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

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee reviewed the list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on 05 May 2023, which had been derived from the Committee's Forward Work Plan 2022/23. The Chair emphasised that the Forward Work Plan was a flexible document that could be updated as required throughout the year as new information emerges.

Reference was made to the two update reports emanating from the previous Task and Finish Groups. The Committee agreed to review the reports at an informal session on conclusion of the meeting scheduled 05 May 2023 whereby Committee could request any further information to be considered at a future meeting, if relevant.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on 5th May 2023 be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23 JANUARY 2023

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2023 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE