

EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

FRIDAY 17TH MAY 2024

PRESENT: Councillor A.C. Jones (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

S.M. Allen	L. Davies	P. Hughes-Griffiths	H. Jones
M.J.A. Lewis	E. Skinner		

Councillors (Virtually):

K.V. Broom	J.M. Charles (substitute)	B.W. Jones	D. Jones
S.L. Rees	J. Williams		

Co-opted Members (In Person):

A. Enoch, Parent Governor Representative
M. Hughes, Church in Wales Representative
V. Kenny, Roman Catholic Church Representative

The following Cabinet Member was in attendance (In Person):

Councillor G. Davies

Also Present (In Person):

A. Rees, Head of Strategy and Learner Support
A Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
E. Forsyth, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness
G. Adams, Principal Manager - Youth Support Service
I. Mainwaring, Participation & Children's Rights Officer
D. Hall-Jones, Member Support Officer
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

C. Pugh, Senior Catering Manager
R. Morris, Members Support Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 am - 11.20 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L. Bowen. The Committee was advised that Councillor M. Charles and Councillor B.W. Jones would be departing the meeting prior to its conclusion.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

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. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE CARMARTHENSHIRE YOUTH COUNCIL

In accordance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Annex B), the Authority had a duty to support the Carmarthenshire Youth Council (CYC) as a representative body of young people to act as a channel for their views across the county and represent those views to local and national decision-making bodies.

The Committee duly considered an update on the work of the CYC in accordance with the four main areas of representation pertaining to Education, Universal, Special Interest and the Welsh Youth Parliament.

Representatives from the CYC thereupon addressed the Committee to provide a synopsis of the range of opportunities offered by the CYC which included policy discussions, community projects and youth-led campaigns; the aim of which was to create positive change and build a more inclusive and vibrant society.

The report highlighted some notable successes, engagements, landmarks and campaigns of the CYC which demonstrated the impact and importance of young people's involvement in decision making and decision-making processes locally, nationally and further afield. Reference was also made to the positive influence of the CYC upon its members; these included valuable skills such as confidence building, speech writing, public speaking, problem solving and teamwork.

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

The Committee commended the CYC on the array of project work undertaken to champion important issues such as Bullying, Childrens Rights, Mental Health, Period Dignity and Domestic Violence. Members were also delighted to note that the dedication of the CYC, both as an organisation and by individual members, had been formally acknowledged over the years with numerous prestigious local and national Awards which included the CAVS and High Sherriff organisation of the year and Community Hero Award 'Child of Courage' accolade.

In response to a query, the Committee was provided with an overview of the CYC structure and selection process whereby the Council invited nominations from its four areas of representation to represent the views and opinions of all young people in the county.

The CYC representatives, in response to a question, expressed that members of the CYC received robust support and encouragement from Officers which

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afforded them the opportunity to have their voices listened to; the impact of which was evidenced within the quality of work produced by the CYC.

With regard to the sharing of best practice amongst Youth Councils, reference was made to opportunities to engage with other Youth Councils at a national level as part of its participation in the Welsh and UK Youth Parliament, however it was acknowledged that engagement at local level could be sporadic due to some other Youth Councils experiencing recruitment difficulties.

Reference was made to the “Our Voice, Our Vote, Our Future” consultation exercise launched in October 2023 to garner the views of secondary schools on the topics/motions that were most important to them and the wider school. The consultation culminated in a total of 5,221 respondents, which was, in the main, attributable to the efforts undertaken by the CYC members and the robust support provided by Officers. The results identified that the most important topics for young people centred upon the need to be taught real life lessons, such as budgeting, first aid and cooking etc. The Head of Strategy and Learner Support assured the Committee that the results of the consultation would be further discussed with the CYC with a view to integrating some aspects, where feasible, into the curriculum.

The Chair emphasised the importance of recognising and raising awareness of the sterling work undertaken by the CYC.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS (UPFSM) PROGRESS UPDATE

Committee considered a report which detailed the progress made on the roll-out of Universal Primary School Free School Meals (UPFSM) provision across Carmarthenshire. The report set out the Authority’s performance in terms of the scale of the roll out against Welsh Government targets, funding arrangements, dietary requirements, staffing implications and capacity issues.

The Committee was pleased to note that the UPFSM offer had been implemented across the county’s 97 educational settings within the Welsh Government target dates and commended the endeavours of officers in this regard.

Funding amounting to £3.8m had been allocated to facilitate the roll out and a vast amount of work had been undertaken to increase capacity and improve the infrastructure of school kitchens to enable the Authority to cater for a 100% uptake of UPFSM across all age groups. Furthermore, the central kitchens had been upgraded, and a new kitchen facility had also been constructed at the old Ysgol Gorslas school site to ‘future proof’ the service and enable a strategic review of resources going forward.

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

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The Senior Catering Manager clarified to the Committee that while the grant funding enabled compliance in terms of infrastructure and capacity issues, further funding in the region of £300k would be required to meet all costs. In respect of the cost per meal allocation from Welsh Government, the Senior Catering Manager confirmed that the funding allocation was under review and the Authority's costings in this regard would be circulated to the Committee in due course.

In response to concerns raised in respect of the sugar content of school meals, an assurance was provided that the Authority was fully compliant with the 'Welsh Government Healthy Eating in Schools' guidelines and the nutritional data of school meals would be circulated to the Committee in due course.

In recognition that the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) was an important measure for all schools across Wales to support vulnerable children concerns were raised that the roll out of UPFSM would adversely impact upon the level of PDG funding available for schools as parents/guardians were no longer required to apply for free school meals. The Head of Education Services and Inclusion clarified that Welsh Government was currently exploring its grant funding mechanism for schools and a consultation exercise was currently underway with a view to ensuring that the deprivation figures held by Welsh Government reflected the challenges faced by schools. The Chair noted that consideration would be given by the Committee to receiving an update report in due course on Welsh Government funding streams. In the interim period, all relevant parents/guardians were encouraged to declare their eligibility for free school meals to enable schools to access the appropriate level of PDG funding.

The Committee reviewed the ongoing staffing pressures within the service which had been further exacerbated by the roll out of UPFSM. Members acknowledged that the demographic and skill set of the current workforce presented the greatest ongoing risk to the service and were assured to note that the situation was being closely monitored, with contingency arrangements in place to ensure that hot school meals could be prepared and delivered to schools in readiness for the lunchtime period.

The Committee welcomed the introduction of the new Local Authority Recruitment System 'Oleo' which had significantly improved the speed and transparency in recruitment. The Committee was assured to note that initiatives had been implemented to facilitate staff retention which included development opportunities and input into the development of menus where possible.

A discussion ensued on the importance of the use of local produce for school meals and the Committee was interested to note that a pilot project was underway whereby a local farm would be utilised to supply produce to two primary schools and a secondary school. Initiatives were also underway to support local produce as part of the British Food Fortnight and the 'Cook 24' scheme had been introduced across schools to develop food leaders and increase the utilisation of local food production. Furthermore, reference was made to the on-site allotment in Llandeilo school where children could help grow and harvest vegetables to be used in cooking lessons.

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RESOLVED that:-

- 5.1 the report be received;**
- 5.2 consideration be given by the Committee to receiving an update report in due course on Welsh Government funding streams;**
- 5.3 the Authority's costings in respect of the cost per school meal be circulated to the Committee in due course;**
- 5.4 the nutritional data in respect of school meals be circulated to the Committee in due course.**

6. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the scrutiny report pertaining to the Gwenllian School proposal.

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

7. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee reviewed the list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on 26 June 2024, which had been derived from the Committee's draft Forward Work Plan for 2024/25.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 26 June 2024 be noted.

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 31 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 31 January 2024 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.