

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price [Chair]

Councillors:

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

Co-opted Members:

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

Also in attendance:

Councillor G. Davies - Executive Board Member for Education & Children
Councillor D.M. Jenkins – Executive Board Member for Resources

The following Officers were in attendance:

S. Davies - Head of Access to Education
R. Hemingway - Head of Financial Services
A. Rees - Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing
A. Thomas - Head of Education and Inclusion Services
E. Forsyth - Principal Educational Support Adviser
S. Griffiths - Modernisation Team Manager
R. Williams - Additional Needs Provision Manager
S. Nolan - Group Accountant
C. Griffiths – School Lead Youth Worker
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer
E. Bryer - Democratic Services Officer
R. Lloyd - Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner - Technical Officer

Virtual Meeting : 10.00 am - 1.20 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T.A.J. Davies and S. Najmi.

The Chair informed the Committee that Mr Gareth Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services was unable to be present at today's meeting due to illness and on behalf of the Committee, he wished Mr Morgans a speedy recovery.

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

The following declarations of personal interest were made:-

Member	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Cllr B. Thomas	7 – Proposal to Change the Nature of Provision at Ysgol y Felin	He is an LEA appointed Governor at Ysgol y Felin
Mr A. Enoch	6 – Proposal to Change the Nature of Provision at Model V.A. Primary School	He is a Parent Governor at Model V.A. Primary School
Rev. D. Richards	6 – Proposal to Change the Nature of Provision at Model V.A. Primary School	She is a Governor at Model V.A. Primary School appointed by the Diocese of Wales

There were no declarations of any party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2021/22-2023/24.

The Committee considered the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24 which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2021/2022 together with indicative figures for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 financial years. The report was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 22nd December, 2020. It also reflected current departmental submissions for savings proposals after taking account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of those savings.

It was noted that, whilst significant work had already been undertaken in preparing the budget, this report represented an initial position statement which would be updated over the coming month as the budget was further developed, council members are engaged and public consultation takes place. The final settlement was due to be received from Welsh Government on 2nd March, 2021.

It was pointed out that Covid-19 has led not just to unprecedented additional costs but also to the collapse of important income, particularly during periods of lockdown. Taken together, it was anticipated that the combination of additional expenditure and income loss would have a £30 million impact on Carmarthenshire's current year budgets. Authorities have submitted monthly claims, which have been assessed and to a very significant extent, fully refunded by WG. Looking ahead to next year, continued WG funding in this way has not been committed at this stage, not least because WG itself does not yet have funding confirmed as a consequence of Westminster Covid-19 related expenditure.

The report noted the main reasons for the Education & Children's Services departmental overspend which was mainly due to the forecast increase in school

deficit balances.

Although the Strategy proposed a 4.89% Council Tax increase for each of the three financial years, the Executive Board had recommended that the increase for 2021/22 be reduced to 4.48%. This recommendation would be considered by Council at its meeting to be held on 3rd March, 2021 when setting the Council Tax level for 2021/22. Additionally, the Welsh Government final settlement figure was to be announced on the 2nd March 2021 and any amendments required to be considered in relation to the Budget Strategy arising from that announcement would also be considered by Council on the 3rd March.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy, relevant to its remit:-

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Education & Children’s Services Department
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the Education & Children’s Services Department
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Education & Children’s Services Department
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Education & Children’s Services Department

Whilst the budget proposals assumed the full delivery of all the savings proposals, together with the identification and delivery of the shortfall in savings proposals for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years, further cost reductions would need to be identified for those latter years in order to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of Council Tax. The savings to be identified in years 2 and 3 of the Strategy amounted to £1.96 million and departments would work over the forthcoming year to identify those savings.

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

- Reference was made to the fact that the departmental overspend was due mainly to the forecast increase in school deficit balances and officers were asked whether the Authority should question the pattern of distributing money to all Local Authorities in Wales. The Chair referred to the fact that the Committee has already requested an analysis of the formula used by the Welsh Government for allocating money throughout Wales;
- It was pointed out that financial accountability rests with governors. All schools can experience falling rolls for a variety of reasons and officers were asked how decisive Governing Bodies are when quick financial decisions are needed to eradicate growing imbalances. The Head of Education & Inclusion Services informed the Committee that officers are totally aware of the financial challenges in our schools. Officers meeting with Headteachers and Governing Bodies to discuss their financial situation. He added that there are also local reasons to take in account and some schools need more support than others to tackle the problems;
- Reference was made to the fact that if the formula for funding was fair it would help counties like Carmarthenshire with a high number of small rural schools and officers were asked what is being done by the WG in relation to the presumption against closure and what discussions have been held with

WG and WLGA in relation to changing the formula and if this was done, would this take the pressure off our smaller schools. The Executive Board Member for Education and Children explained that the funding is allocated to the pupil so as pupils numbers fall then so does the funding allocated to the school. Officers from the Finance and Education Department work hard with schools to address the problems they are experiencing;

- Asked how many schools have a deficit balance, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that 44 out of 112 schools have a deficit balance;
- Reference was made to the fact that we need to put pressure on WG to allocate more money to our schools especially with the new curriculum. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services referred to the that there is a presumption against closure, however, WG funds per pupil and not per school which creates problems for the Authority. Representations are made to WG by the Director via the Association of Directors of Education. Any school with less than 92 pupils is considered to be a small school so any small school funding has to be spread among so many schools which fall into this category that it ends up being a very small amount of funding;
- Officers were asked if the outcome of the discussions between the unions and Welsh Government regarding the 2.75% pay increase is known and what the effect will be. The Executive Board Member referred to the fact that this has caused a lot of uncertainty because WG sanctioned the pay increase, however, the cost of this will have to be met by the Local Authority. The Head of Financial Services confirmed that there was sufficient funding in the draft budget to validate this cost for the September 2020 pay award;
- Reference was made to the fact that pupils have missed out on a year of schooling and officers were asked if there was a recognition at government level that in order bring pupils back up to the required level there needs to be some sort of financial boost to address that. The Executive Board Member for Education & Children stated that this was a huge concern and he agreed that additional money should be forthcoming to enable this issue to be addressed, however, he was unaware of any such provision. The Head of Financial Services explained that an announcement had been made the day before regarding an approximate additional £65m to support schools, however, it was not yet known how WG will deploy that funding. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services added that additional Accelerated Learning Programme grants have been made available for secondary school pupils in examination years. However, there was a challenge regarding how late this funding is received by our schools with some grants being received last week which have to be spent completely by the end of the financial year which does not allow any time for forward planning by headteachers. Officers have gone back to WG to implore them to consider this and allow headteachers sufficient time to make prudent use of this additional funding;
- Concern was expressed with regard to grant funding coming in very late and often being withdrawn altogether which makes it difficult for schools to budget. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services agreed that it was highly frustrating for headteachers and some of the terms and conditions also make it increasingly difficult. The Group Accountant added that this was something that officers constantly raise with WG. The Executive Board Member for Resources agreed that the basis for the funding formula is faulted as it does not acknowledge rurality issues and queried whether big

urban authorities have the same issues with delegated budgets. If they do not then there are obviously issues with the formula funding which would need to be taken up with WG. The Chair reminded the Committee that Finance Officers agreed to look into this issue at the last meeting;

- Officers were asked if funding has been made available to WG to provide IT equipment for vulnerable families as there is a real need to ensure that their IT requirements are addressed to ensure that every child in every family has the same opportunities. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services explained that to date over 2000 laptops and dongles have been distributed to families throughout the county;
- With regard to the Education & Child Psychology Services, officers were asked if this service was being delivered remotely and whether that had increased the number of people who can benefit. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services informed the Committee that the service has continued during the pandemic with all services delivered remotely and accessibility to external providers such as therapists has also remained. He added that in many instances in services across the department we are actually responding quicker and more effectively because we are working remotely and are able to get in touch with parents more quickly because they are now more au fait with using the technology available to them. Working remotely was not detrimental in all circumstances.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

4.1 that the 2021/22–2023/24 Revenue Budget Strategy be received;

4.2 that the Charging Digest for the Education & Children’s Services Department, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

5. AN EVALUATION INTO HOW CARMARTHESHIRE'S EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENT RESPONDED TO COVID-19

The Committee considered a report providing an overview of how the Local Authority and region has worked with schools and Pupil Referral Units to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils during the COVID-19 period between June and November 2020 i.e. the period after the initial lockdown when schools were reopening.

Officers in the Education and Children’s Services Department had to radically adapt the way they traditionally work in order to focus primarily on supporting schools and services so that the children and young people in our care were able to access all the support and interventions they required. It was an unprecedented period and decisions had to be taken by the Director, Departmental Management Team and Service Managers based on the information available at that time.

Over the Autumn term 2020 ESTYN undertook a thematic survey to reflect on the approach of Local Authorities, regional consortia and schools to teaching, learning and pupil wellbeing. The review would provide Welsh Government, individual Local Authorities and regional consortia with a report reflecting their work and approaches during the lockdown period and at the start of the period when schools return to full operation. The reports will enable Welsh Government to understand the broad strengths and lessons learnt in the way Local Authorities and regions operated during this period. It would also identify how learning from before the summer was used to support planning for and delivery of blended learning

approaches and support for vulnerable learners during the Autumn term. This would also enable lessons to be learned from the most effective practice in relation to capacity, collaboration, future planning and change management which will support planned reforms in education and local government over the next few years.

The findings of these reports were positive, reflecting upon effective partnership working between all involved in the education system. However, a few areas needed further consideration and would be incorporated into the Departmental Business Planning for 2021/22.

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

- Concern was expressed in relation to those schools being monitored by Estyn and officers were asked if this should be postponed until schools are open normally again. The Principal Educational Support Adviser informed the Committee that there is a range of practice from Estyn in this regard and they are also undertaking pastoral calls to schools to ensure they are making the progress with their children and staff as is needed. For schools in Estyn review, there is a meeting next week when schools' progress will be discussed so instead of putting pressure on schools to produce reports, progress will be discussed by officers. Positive feedback has been received in relation to the pastoral calls being made by Estyn;
- Officers were asked how ERW assisted the county during the pandemic. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services informed the Committee that ERW has been providing assistance with distance learning. They have provided online courses for teaching staff and they have created safeguarding policies. The Additional Needs Provision Manager added that the ERW Regional ALN Group has developed a number of bespoke training modules in relation to vulnerable learners. ERW has assisted in providing electronic training packages to support teachers, schools, families and pupils which have been shared across the region. The Principal Educational Support Adviser added that ERW has worked with schools in relation to developing wellbeing resources to ensure the wellbeing of staff and pupils. Positive feedback has been received from headteachers in this regard;
- Officers were asked how we define vulnerable learners and whether they are confident that that is being applied consistently throughout the county. The Head of Education & Inclusion Services informed the Committee that it was essential to identify vulnerable children and families very early on. They were all flagged and officers made sure that a close eye was kept on them. A strategy for vulnerable learners was implemented which included contacting vulnerable families on a weekly basis and also ensuring that the pupil was spoken to. The Additional Needs Provision Manager explained that the Authority uses the WG definition of a vulnerable learner which has been used throughout the pandemic. Whilst the WG definition was used, it also included those children who became vulnerable as a consequence of the pandemic. The Principal Education Support Adviser added that Support Advisers have been liaising closely with schools and engaging routinely with vulnerable pupils and their families. The Head of Education & Inclusion Services referred to the fact that many officers have gone above and beyond to provide services during the pandemic and he expressed his thanks to all those officers;

- Officers were asked what departmental plans are in place to help schools to prepare for the new curriculum. The Head of Curriculum & Wellbeing explained that officers are working on various initiatives. Some schools are already implementing elements of the new curriculum to help with current challenges e.g. literacy, numeracy and digital capacity;
- Officers were asked for an update on the provision of IT equipment to vulnerable learners and asked if they are confident that all schools have been proactive in supporting their vulnerable pupils. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services informed the Committee that over 4000 Chromebooks, 1400 teaching aids, 564 computers, 634 laptops have been handed out, as well as a substantial amount of dongles. Additional stock is also expected. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing added that IT equipment has been distributed in three tranches and a fourth tranche is currently being planned;
- Officers were asked what measures are in place to help teachers with their health and wellbeing over the coming months. The Head of Education & Inclusion Services assured the Committee that the wellbeing of teachers and headteachers is at the forefront not only because of the additional work pressures but also due to their concerns regarding their own health and returning to school during the pandemic. The School Improvement Team are conscious of the importance of reducing the stress on headteachers so the volume of information requested has been drastically reduced. Drop in sessions have also been arranged for any teaching staff to share their concerns. One key change that has been made is to amend the name of Challenge Advisers to Educational Support Advisers as it sets the basis for the relationship in that they are there to support not to challenge.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME - PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF PROVISION AT MODEL VA PRIMARY SCHOOL

[NOTE: Mr A. Enoch and Rev D. Richards, having earlier declared a prejudicial interest in this item, left the meeting prior to the consideration and determination thereof.]

The Committee considered a report detailing a proposal to change the nature of provision at Model V.A. Primary School.

In accordance with Welsh Government Strategic Plans, the Authority launched Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and its vision for a bilingual Carmarthenshire. To achieve this, the Authority will deliver significant growth in Welsh medium education and training to increase the number of children and young people who become fluent in both Welsh and English and have the ability to use these languages confidently with their families, in their communities and in the workplace.

With this in mind, the Local Authority has a responsibility to provide its communities with the best education and opportunities possible and believes that this can be achieved through set objectives. Carmarthenshire County Council is fully supportive of the aim that all pupils are able to speak, read and write in both Welsh and English fluently by the end of Key Stage 2 and will provide services that

will ensure high quality learning opportunities for all Carmarthenshire's children, young people and adults, thereby enabling them to achieve their full potential as lifetime learners in the context of the unique bilingual nature of the County.

In order to support Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and national policies in moving the county's schools along the Welsh language continuum, it was proposed to change the nature of provision at Model VA Primary School. It was proposed that from 1st September, 2022 the nature of Foundation Phase provision will change to Welsh medium education. This will only affect pupils starting in the Foundation Phase at the school from September 2022 onwards. Current pupils attending the school will be unaffected.

With learners accessing Welsh medium education in the Foundation Phase this would, in time, necessitate setting up a Welsh Stream at Key Stage 2 to ensure continuity of provision. This would be reviewed in line with Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

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

- The importance was stressed of taking people with us if we want the language continuum to work and officers were asked if it was possible to extend the consultation period in view of the concerns expressed. The Head of Access to Education explained that it was not possible to go out to consultation without Executive Board approval and this report sought the Committee's approval to recommend to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated;
- Reference was made to the need to consult with parents and get them on board early on in the process;
- In terms of those parents who will be the first to be affected by any changes in provision, officers were asked if contact could be made with the parents of children who attend nurseries where children progress to the school in question.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 6.1 that the proposal to change the nature of provision at Model V.A. Primary School, as detailed in the report, be endorsed;**
- 6.2 that it be recommended to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated.**

[NOTE: At 12.55 p.m., prior to consideration of the next item, the Committee's attention was drawn to Council Procedure Rule 9 – Duration of Meeting and, as the meeting had been underway for nearly three hours, it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable the Committee to conclude the remaining business on the agenda.]

7. MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME - PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF PROVISION AT YSGOL Y FELIN.

[NOTE: Cllr B. Thomas had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered a report detailing a proposal to change the nature of

provision at Ysgol y Felin.

In accordance with Welsh Government Strategic Plans, the Authority launched Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and its vision for a bilingual Carmarthenshire. To achieve this, the Authority will deliver significant growth in Welsh medium education and training to increase the number of children and young people who become fluent in both Welsh and English and have the ability to use these languages confidently with their families, in their communities and in the workplace.

With this in mind, the Local Authority has a responsibility to provide its communities with the best education and opportunities possible and believes that this can be achieved through set objectives. Carmarthenshire County Council is fully supportive of the aim that all pupils are able to speak, read and write in both Welsh and English fluently by the end of Key Stage 2 and will provide services that will ensure high quality learning opportunities for all Carmarthenshire's children, young people and adults, thereby enabling them to achieve their full potential as lifetime learners in the context of the unique bilingual nature of the County.

In order to support Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and national policies in moving the county's schools along the Welsh language continuum, it was proposed to change the nature of provision at Ysgol y Felin. It was proposed that from 1st September, 2022 the nature of Foundation Phase provision will change to Welsh medium education. This will only affect pupils starting in the Foundation Phase at the school from September 2022 onwards. Current pupils attending the school will be unaffected.

With learners accessing Welsh medium education in the Foundation Phase, the capacity of the Welsh stream in KS2 to cope with the potential increased demand for places will have to be monitored and reviewed in line with Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 7.1 that the proposal to change the nature of provision at Ysgol y Felin, as detailed in the report, be endorsed;**
- 7.2 that it be recommended to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated.**

8. TASK & FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT - ALN FORMULA FUNDING

The Committee considered a report providing a final summary of the work of the Task & Finish Group established to undertake a review into the model for funding Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in schools. The financial support for ALN has experienced much pressure and strain for some time due to increasing demands on the current level of resources available. The Committee was also aware of the key changes being made by the Welsh Government in this area which will lead to a new way of delivering support to pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

The Task and Finish review was set up to examine the current funding formula and to consider possible alternative models to meet the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. The Act highlights

the need for an integrated, collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring which facilitates early, timely and effective interventions. The underlying need for a more reactive model of funding was a key consideration.

The key aims and objectives for the review were detailed in a planning and scoping document endorsed at the meeting held on 4th July, 2019 when it was decided to establish the Task & Finish Group, along with the membership.

As part of its considerations the group considered a wide range of information in the form of written and verbal reports containing current funding models and possible new parameters for funding. The group identified that there was a need for greater delegation of ALN resources to underpin:-

- strengthening universal and targeted provision for children with ALN;
- supporting schools to set in place early intervention and staged approaches in a timely manner;
- enabling schools to meet their statutory duties to make decisions relating to Additional Learning Provision;
- building confidence of parents/carers that needs can be met promptly without unnecessary process or dispute;
- promptly resourcing pupils at School Action Plus;
- reducing the requirement for statutory assessment and Statementing processes to direct funding for low incidence high need ALN pupils;
- central pot for complex medical needs;
- giving schools financial flexibility, enabling schools to access timely external support for children, ensuring that schools have the flexibility to meet children's needs, and better involving schools in decisions relating to ALN.

The Group had regard to the Council's current delegated funding model. For most children in mainstream schools, including those with ALNs and disabilities, funding is allocated to them through the school budget and is known as the per pupil funding. This funding supports all learning and is used for staff salaries, including the ALNCO, facilities and ALN resources. A percentage of the total amount of per pupil funding received by a school should be spent on providing for pupils with ALN. In Carmarthenshire, schools are expected to allocate at least 5% of their per pupil funding to their ALN budget.

A series of workshops with headteachers considered various funding models. It was agreed during these workshops that any new formula funding mechanism needed to support ALN Transformation that will reform the way in which children with ALN are identified, assessed and supported. Previous categories of ALN-school action, school action + and statements will cease, and schools will be required to make statutory Additional Learning Provision through Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

Following input from the task and finish the LA in consultation with headteachers concluded and agreed to the following principles of funding:-

- £1,000 per LAC pupil
- Remainder split 25% FSM, 25% school action, 50% school action +

With the intention that, as statements reduce, funding will transfer to the ALN supplement to allow schools greater flexibility in meeting the needs of pupils with ALN.

In consultation with Headteachers the formula going forward considered a range of proxy indicators which reflected the contextual nature of schools:-

- Social deprivation
- Pupil numbers
- Free School Meals
- Looked After Children

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 8.1 to note the conclusion of the Task & Finish Group review on ALN Formula Funding;**
8.2 that the final report of the Task & Finish Group on ALN Formula Funding be endorsed;

9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORTS

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny reports:-

- Proposal to Relocate Ysgol Dewi Sant
- Corporate Strategy
- Departmental Business Plans

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

11. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 6TH JANUARY, 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 6th January, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE