

Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council

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Chair's Foreword

As the Chair of the Committee I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year.

It was a challenging year, which was dominated by the Covid pandemic and called for actions and ways of working which none of us foresaw. The pandemic meant that much of our usual ways of working had be halted – no more committee meetings at County Hall, no school visits and a halt to site visits to Children's Services which had been arranged.

I would like to thank both the elected and co-opted members of the Committee for their input and dedication over the past year in attempting to scrutinise the authority's performance and policies.

Since the resumption of online meetings of the Committee, members have spent much time scrutinising the authority's response to the pandemic, which had a significant impact on the Education and Children's Services Department.

The Committee has also scrutinised the Education Services' 10 year strategy, proposals to shorten the internal democratic process for school organisation decisions, staff and pupil mental health and wellbeing, the financial challenges facing schools, the Department's Capital and Revenue Budget proposals for 2021/22, the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, the Council's plans to implement the new curriculum and the impact of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms as introduced by the Welsh Government. The Committee also discussed a number of school organisation proposals.

I would again like to thank Democratic Services and Education and Children's Services Officers for their input and for their professionalism in supporting the work of the Committee during a challenging year for all.

It is clear that officers of the Education and Children's Service and School Leaders have had to respond to a significant number of challenges posed by the covid pandemic, whilst also trying to manage significant national changes such as the development of a new curriculum for Wales and of significant reform to the ALN system. We owe them all a huge debt of gratitude.

I look forward to working with Officers, Members and co-opted members in a more positive 2021/22, and help further support and develop Education and Children's Services in Carmarthenshire.



Councillor Darren Price
Chair of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

The Scrutiny function is a key element of the County Council's governance arrangements and decision-making process. Although not a decision-making body, Scrutiny is at its most effective when it grasps the potential to influence and inform decisions made by both the Council and partner bodies across the county.

Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution requires all Scrutiny Committees to "*prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committee's activities over the previous year*".

The main aim of the report is to highlight the work undertaken by the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee during 2019/20. It aims to provide members with an opportunity to reflect on the achievements during the year and to identify what worked well and where improvements could be made. This analysis is instrumental in developing scrutiny. Additionally, the report may also facilitate discussion on items which could be identified for inclusion within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Councillor Darren Price and is made up of 14 Elected Members and 5 voting Co-opted Members (3 elected parent governor members, 1 representative from the Church in Wales and 1 representative from the Roman Catholic Church). Support is provided by the Democratic Services Unit and other Council officers, as and when required.

2. Overview of the Work of the Committee in 2020/21

2.1 Number of Meetings

The Scrutiny Committee held five formal meetings during the 2020/21 municipal year. The meeting scheduled to be held from April to November, 2020 was due to cancellation and postponement due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The meetings recommenced in November following Welsh Government passing temporary emergency regulations to relax some of the rules relating to the conduct of council business

The budget consultation reports were considered by the Committee at its meeting held in January 2021.

2.2 The Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee develops its own Forward Work Programme (FWP). In November 2020 the Committee met to consider its 2020/21 FWP and identified items to be considered during the forthcoming municipal year. This involved the inclusion of standard items such as performance, budget and action plan monitoring reports. Additional reports were also requested by members at those meetings and throughout the year and the FWP was amended accordingly. In the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the FWP, as confirmed by the Committee at its meeting held on the 23rd November, 2020.

The concept and development of the Forward Work Programme and the process for its agreement has allowed each Scrutiny Committee to determine its own agendas. The benefits of such an approach has led to an improved level of debate and input during Scrutiny Committee meetings.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 placed long term sustainability at the forefront of how public services are designed and delivered and it places emphasis on public bodies to work in partnership with each other and the public to prevent and tackle problems.

The Education & Children Scrutiny Committee's key responsibilities are:

- Educational Standards & School Performance
- Inclusion & Additional Learning Needs
- Welsh Medium Education
- School Modernisation
- Adult Community Learning
- Youth Services
- Youth Offending
- School meals
- Children's Services including Social Services & Family Support Services

To compliment the work undertaken during formal meetings, the Committee also undertakes other scrutiny functions such as Task and Finish, One Day Scrutiny, visits to establishments falling within its remit together with member development sessions.

Due to the pandemic and the resulting redeployment of staff the current Task & Finish project was put on hold. The Committee has now decided to review the scope of the Task and Finish Group. Additionally, no site visits were undertaken.

2.2.1 Reports Circulated Outside of the Formal Committee Process

In line with the decision made by the Committee to receive some reports via e-mail rather than through the formal committee process, the following reports were circulated to the Committee during the 2020/21 municipal year:-

- Budget monitoring reports
- Performance Monitoring reports
- Corporate Strategy reports

2.3 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

Performance Monitoring Reports - One of the principal roles of Scrutiny Committees is to monitor the performance of services and functions within its remit. They undertake this work mainly through the consideration of performance monitoring reports and various action plan monitoring reports.

The performance monitoring reports provide a balanced picture of performance across the relevant service areas.

2.3.1 Carmarthenshire County Council's Annual Performance Report (Half Year – 1st April to 30th September 2020) – As part of its performance monitoring role, the Committee received relevant information from the Council's key strategies and plans. In January, 2021 the Committee considered the Council's 2020/21 Half Year Performance Report (1st April to 30th September, 2020) which included extracts for its service remit and which had been produced in accordance with the requirements of both the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales Act 2015). The Committee considered the following sections within the Annual Report which were relevant to the remit of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee:-

- **WBO 1 –**
 - The % of child attendance at an allocated Flying Start free childcare placement
 - The % of unauthorised absence at an allocated Flying Start free childcare placement
- **WBO 3 –**
 - % of schools graded as "Good" or "Satisfactory" for school building condition.
 - % of pupil attendance in primary schools
 - % of authorised absence in primary schools
 - % of pupil attendance in secondary schools
 - % of authorised absence in secondary schools
- **WBO 4 –**
 - % of Year 13 Leavers not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
 - % of Year 11 Leavers not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

Outcome

County Council approved the Council's Annual Report for 2020/21 at its meeting held in January, 2021.

2.3.2 Departmental Education & Children Business Plan

2020/21 – In April, 2021 the Committee considered the Education & Children Departmental Business Plan 2021/22 which detailed the department's aims and objectives and priorities. This provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider and comment upon the priorities outlined for the department for the year period.

2.3.3. Corporate Strategy - In February 2021, the Committee considered the draft updated Corporate Strategy 2018-23 together with the relevant Well-being Objectives. The documents had been updated to reflect

developing priorities and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and climate change.

2.3.4 Staff and Pupil Wellbeing and Mental Health – The Committee considered a report providing an update on staff and pupil wellbeing and mental health as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report outlined the additional support and preventative measures put in place by the Department of Education and Children. Whilst focussing on the wellbeing of pupils and school staff, the report also included reference to the wellbeing of other young people who may not be in school but were still under the remit of the Department e.g. young adults in the Youth Support Service

Outcome:

The Executive Board Member for Education & Children raised with the Executive Board the issue of lobbying the Welsh Government to request that teachers be included high on the list of those to be vaccinated.

2.3.5 Department Self-Evaluation and 10 Year Strategy – This report was scheduled to be considered by the Committee at its March meeting, however, due to Covid-19 this was not achievable. It was therefore proposed that the report be finalised at a half-day workshop and then aligned with business planning and the work of strategic groups with a revised submission date to be confirmed.

2.3.6 Actions & Referrals - During the course of the municipal year several requests for additional items/information are made by members of the Committee to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role. Actions & Referrals updates are presented to Committee which provide an update on progress in relation to these requests.

Due to the pandemic and the fact that no meetings were held for several months, no Actions & Referrals updates were presented to Committee during the 2020/21 municipal year.

2.4 Revenue & Capital Budgets

2.4.1 Budget Monitoring Reports - The Committee received quarterly budget monitoring reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets. These reports enabled members to monitor the level of spend in each area and the progress made in connection with any capital works and to raise any concerns at the formal meeting, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

2.4.2 Revenue Budget Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23 - As well as monitoring the current budget, the Committee was also consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23. The report provided the Committee with the current proposals for the revenue budget for

2020/21 together with the indicative figures for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years.

Outcome:

As part of the widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23, the Committee considered the budget proposals. A number of comments were raised but the Committee did not put forward any recommendations to change any of the proposals.

2.4.3 Education & Children Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2019/20 - The Committee considered its Annual Report for 2019/20 in November, 2020 which in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution provided an overview of the Committee's activities over the previous year.

2.5 Schools

2.5.1 Modernising Education Programme – At various meetings during the 2020/21, as part of the Modernising Education Programme, the Committee was consulted on the following school proposals for change:-

- to relocate Ysgol Heol Goffa to a new site and increase its capacity from 75 to 120
- to review primary education provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas
- to reconfigure and remodel behaviour support services at Ysgol Rhydygors to improve provision for children and young people
- to change the age range at Swiss Valley primary school from 4-11 to 3-11
- to review primary education provision in the Mynyddgarreg and Gwenllian areas
- to change the nature of provision at Model VA Primary School
- to change the nature of provision at Ysgol y Felin

Outcome:

The first MEP proposal was endorsed by the Committee on 23rd November, 2020 and subsequently considered by the Executive Board on the 21st December, 2020 and Council on the 12th May, 2021 (due to April's scheduled meeting being cancelled).

The second, third, fourth and fifth MEP were endorsed by the Committee on 23rd November, 2020 and subsequently considered by the Executive Board on the 21st December, 2020 where it was resolved to initiate the formal consultation during the Spring Term 2021 and a report be submitted to the Executive Board at the end of the consultation period.

The 6th and 7th MEP were endorsed by the Committee on 28th January, 2021 and subsequently considered by the Executive Board on the 8th February, 2021 where it was resolved to initiate the formal consultation and a report be submitted to the Executive Board at the end of the consultation period.

2.5.2 Proposal to shorten the internal democratic process for approving statutory consultations

- The Committee was informed that, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all members of the MEP team were redeployed for a period of around 4 months to work in other critical areas in the department and as such were only able to complete very limited amounts of project work. Prior to the pandemic, the team had planned to undertake several statutory consultations (in relation to school reorganisation or federation matters) with imminent commencement, all of which had to be postponed with rescheduled dates to be confirmed. This did not include any statutory school reorganisations that would have been brought forward as a result of the conclusion of the MEP review.

The redeployment of the MEP team resulted in a delay to school reorganisation proposals of around 6 months due to the need to establish new timelines for each proposal and update all documentation with the most recent data sets. With regards to Carmarthenshire County Council's investment programme, all projects with contractors on site at the time of initial lockdown were shut down and closed, with re-commencement dates continually being approved to allow works to continue. As a result, it was anticipated that the pandemic will have a significant impact on the MEP programme in terms of funding and timelines.

2.5.3 Education Strategy 2020-2030

- The Committee considered the Education Services Strategy. Local Authorities have defined responsibilities to deliver high quality services to meet the needs of all children and young people. The strategy sets out a clear, shared vision for the role that Education Services plays in the future development of vibrant communities and a prosperous economy in Carmarthenshire.

Outcome:

The Committee was informed that, following feedback from the Executive Board, the strategy now covered a 10 year period from 2020-2030.

2.5.4 Estyn Report and Internal Review on Covid Response / Education Support for Vulnerable Learners

- 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 re-opening.

2.5.5 ALN Transformation Action Plan (previously Scrutiny School Visits Framework) (Additional Learning Needs) – The report was due to be considered in April, 2021 but final guidance was yet to be received from Welsh Government and will now be scheduled for consideration in the 2021/22 municipal year.

Outcome:

Agreed that it will be scheduled for consideration in the 2021/22 municipal year.

2.5.6 Task and Finish Group Final Report – ALN 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 ALN in schools. The financial support for ALN has experienced much pressure and strain for some time due to the increasing demands on the current level of resources available with the key changes being made by WG in this area which leads to a new way of delivering support to pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

Outcome:

Agreed that the final report of the Task and Finish Group on ALN Funding be endorsed.

2.5.7 Impact of Covid-19 on Carmarthenshire Children and Young People - The Committee considered a report detailing a Community Impact Assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact on our children and young people and the Department/Council's response to the challenges faced over the last six months.

Whilst the report did not cover all aspects of the Department's work since March, it provided an insight into some of the challenges and the solutions developed to address those challenges.

2.5.8 Wesp Update – The Committee considered a report providing an update on progress in implementing the Carmarthenshire Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-21. The report also appraised the Committee of anticipated developments in Welsh Government policy.

The current WESP has been extended by one year and will conclude no later than September 2022. The next WESP is to be a 10-year plan to 2031. WG have shared the planning template and criteria with LAs. This and proposed ancillary developments indicate that there will be some noteworthy changes which have certain implications for decision making in Carmarthenshire.

Outcome:

Agreed that a workshop be held at a later date (23rd June, 2021) to discuss the WESP document in detail and training within schools.

2.5.9 Curriculum for Wales – In April, 2021 the Committee considered a report providing an overview of the support available to Carmarthenshire's schools and specialist settings from the County Council and from the regional consortium, ERW as they implement the Curriculum for Wales by September, 2022.

2.6 Additional Reports Requested

The Committee did not request any additional reports during the year.

2.7 Public Engagement

Scrutiny provides the opportunity for the public to become involved in the Council's activities. Any member of the public can request that an item be placed on the agenda and if they are a resident of Carmarthenshire or own a business or are employed within Carmarthenshire they may ask questions at Scrutiny meetings.

In order to promote public awareness of Scrutiny Committees and the ability of the public to put forward topics for discussion, the Forward Work Programmes of each of the five Scrutiny Committees and details of how the public can become involved are published on the Authority's website:

<https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/committees-meetings/scrutiny/#.Xp7Am6aQxMs>

The Media & Marketing Division also advertise details of any forthcoming items which may be of interest to the public.

Also, a letter is sent to all Town & Community Councils on behalf of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum promoting the work of Scrutiny Committees within Carmarthenshire and inviting participation by suggesting future topics for consideration and/or attending meetings to observe.

Whilst the Committee did not receive any suggestions of possible topics from the public during 2020/21, the Committee's Forward Work Programme included a range of topics which required public consultation/participation.

3. Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task and Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task and Finish exercise in 2020/21.

3.2 Site Visits

3.2.1 Schools

Due to current restrictions Scrutiny visits are not possible. This will be reviewed as soon as legislation is changed and that safe working practice can be put in place.

3.3 Development Sessions

The following all-member development sessions /seminars were held during 2020/21, to which Committee members were invited: -

- Microsoft Teams Training for online meetings – numerous sessions June 2020
- Zoom Training for online meetings – December /January
- Mod.Gov New App training (Delivered by Civica) – October
- Scrutiny Training (Delivered by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) October
- Online Scrutiny (Delivered by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) November
- Section 106 Agreements and Unilateral Undertakings – February
- COVID-19 Vaccination Briefing (Hywel Dda University Health Board) - February
- Introduction to Ash Dieback Disease and the County Council's Roles and Responsibilities – March
- Growing Carmarthenshire: Progressive Procurement, food supply chains and Future Opportunities – March
- Rural Enterprise Dwellings – March
- One Planet Developments - April

In addition to the above, several budget seminars were held during January as part of the Council's consultation process on the 2021/22 Revenue Budget and the five-year capital programme.

4 Challenges

The past year has been a challenging period for the Authority and the Committee has continued to be constructive in its role in scrutinising performance and contributing to policies and decisions. The Education & Children's Services department's services and schools were placed under significant pressure during the Coronavirus pandemic. The department continued to be under pressure at the end of the municipal year as a result of Covid-19.

It has been a balancing act for the Committee in undertaking its scrutiny duty without impacting on the resourcing of front-line services.

5 Future Work

The Committee made progress during the latter part of 2020/21 and will continue to concentrate on topics where members' input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. To ensure that the best use is being made of meeting time, the Committee is keen to continue implementing the principles of the Centre for Public Scrutiny in order to achieve a more streamlined and focused scrutiny process.

The future work of the Committee will be considered regularly as part of the monitoring of the Forward Work Programme during the course of the year, together with the Executive Board Forward Work Programme.

In order to enhance Scrutiny, members will continue to attend development sessions,

seek officers' advice where appropriate and make full use of informal pre-meeting discussion. The Committee will also continue to seek topics for discussion from Town and Community Councils and promote public engagement.

6 Support for the Scrutiny Function

Support for Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny function is provided by the Democratic Services Unit, based within the Administration & Law Division of the Chief Executive's Department.

Support for the Scrutiny function includes:

- Formulating, in accordance with the FWP, and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings a minimum of 4 working days prior to the meeting;
- Providing support and constitutional advice to the Scrutiny Committees and to members of those Committees as well as producing minutes of their meetings and ensuring any issues arising from those meetings are actioned;
- Giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to executive and non-executive members of the Council and its officers;
- Managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire through engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs with the Executive Board;
- Advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as and when guidance is published;
- Managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes in conjunction with Scrutiny Committee members;
- Managing and co-ordinating Scrutiny review work, including the administration of scrutiny Task and Finish Groups, assisting in writing reports in conjunction with the groups and assisting in the implementation and monitoring of completed reviews;
- Assisting with the Scrutiny member development programme.

For more information on Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire including Forward Work Programmes, Task and Finish reports and annual reports, visit the County Council's website at: www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/scrutiny.

To contact the Democratic Services Unit, please call 01267 224028 or e-mail scrutiny@carmarthenshire.gov.uk.

7. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/21 year is shown in the table below. A total of 5 meetings were held during the 2020/21 municipal year.

Scrutiny Committee Member	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Liam Bowen	4	82%
Cllr. Kim Broom	5	100%
Cllr. John Jenkins	4	80%
Cllr. Betsan Jones	4	80%
Cllr. Dot Jones	4	80%
Cllr. Gary Jones	5	100%
Cllr. Jean Lewis	5	100%
Cllr. Shahana Najmi	0	0%
Cllr. Darren Price	5	100%
Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone	5	100%
Cllr. Bill Thomas	4	80%
Cllr. Edward Thomas	5	100%
Cllr. Arwel Davies	2	40%
Cllr. Dorian Williams	5	100%
Parent Governor Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Mr. Anthony Enoch	4	80%
Church Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Mrs Vera Kenny	3	60%
Rev D. Richards	2	40%
Substitutes	Meetings Attended	
Cllr. Sue Allen	3	
Cllr. Deryk Cundy	1	
Executive Board Member	Meetings Attended	
Cllr. Glynog Davies	5	