

EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A.C. Jones (Chair) (In Person)

Councillors (In Person):

S.M. Allen	L. Davies	P. Hughes-Griffiths	S.L. Rees
E. Skinner			

Councillors (Virtually):

K.V. Broom	L.M. Davies	B.W. Jones	D. Jones
M.J.A. Lewis	M. Thomas	J.M. Charles (substitute)	

Co-opted Members (In Person):

A. Enoch, Parent Governor
V. Kenny, Roman Catholic Church Representative

Co-opted Members (Virtually):

F. Healey-Benson. Parent Governor

The following Cabinet Members were in attendance (In Person):

G. Davies
A. Lenny

Also Present (In Person):

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services
C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services
E. Forsyth, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness
S. Nolan, Group Accountant
E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer [Minute Taker]

Also Present (Virtually):

S. Davies, Head of Access to Education
A. Rees, Head of Strategy and Learner Support
A Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer
I. Altman, Partneriaeth Representative
C. Morgan, Partneriaeth Representative
G. Schiavone, Partneriaeth Representative

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 - 11.55 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from co-opted member D. Elias and Councillor L. Bowen.

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

Member	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Cllr. Llinos Davies	5. Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 to 2025/26	Husband teaches music in a secondary school.
Carys Jones	5. Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 to 2025/26	Daughter in Law works under the Council's Education and Children's Services Department in a school within the County.
Betsan Jones	5. Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 to 2025/26	Son is a Headteacher in a school within the County.

There were no declarations of party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. THE CURRICULUM FOR WALES AND SUPPORT PROVIDED FOR SCHOOLS

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the support available to Carmarthenshire's schools, specialist settings and Pupil Referral Units from the County Council and from the regional consortium, Partneriaeth, to facilitate the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. In accordance with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, primary schools had implemented the new curriculum in September 2022, whereas Carmarthenshire secondary schools would introduce the new curriculum from September 2023.

The Committee thereupon received a presentation on the development of the new Curriculum for Wales which sought to ensure robust and effective pedagogy to meet the needs of individual pupils at all levels to enable schools to effectively progress in line with the aims of the National Mission. Accordingly, the new Curriculum for Wales had been organised around 6 Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) underpinned by the Cross Curricular Responsibilities of Literacy, Numeracy, Digital Competence and the Wider Skills.

The presentation detailed the nature of support provided to address the challenges faced by schools in adhering to the range of complex and mandatory elements required in the development and provision of the new curriculum. In this regard, an overview of the Partneriaeth Business Plan was provided to the Committee which had embedded the new curriculum into its strategic objectives

and Professional Learning Offer, in addition to the provision of bespoke, localised support for schools.

The Committee received a synopsis of the Authority's Education and Children's Services department Improvement Strategy which was aligned to the Welsh Government Guidance for School Improvement and aimed to work alongside schools to reflect upon the progress achieved by pupils as a result of the curriculum provision. Consideration was also given to the Carmarthenshire Professional Learning offer for schools. The presentation concluded that the priority areas for 2022 2023 focussed upon the following areas:

- Welsh government and cross regional meetings; sharing key focus areas and expectations in a timely manner
- Strategy and professional learning in relation to Curriculum Design; translating the theory into practice
- Effective use financial resources
- Skill progression
- Cluster working
- Transition
- Assessment and progression (within each AOLE)
- Sharing effective practice across schools

The Committee welcomed the positive work being developed across the schools within Carmarthenshire, however it was acknowledged that the level of progress varied across schools.

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

Committee considered the challenges within the context of the low uptake of professional learning offered by Partneriaeth and the perceived lack of support to schools for curriculum development. Capacity issues within schools had been identified as a key barrier to accessing training and the level of progress varied across schools. Accordingly, a bespoke Local Authority level approach had been implemented for Carmarthenshire to support the needs of schools and which focussed upon the provision of training to understand pupil progression (age 3-16years) in the Curriculum for Wales and to address the mandatory elements pertaining to the 'what matters' statements. It was reported that training and development sessions were available to schools by way of physical sessions provided at times convenient to schools, the recordings of which were also available online to ensure accessibility for all.

A concern was raised in respect of the pressures faced by schools in view of the significant workload on teachers and school staff. Committee was assured to note that the capacity issues had been acknowledged by both the Local Authority and Partneriaeth, with endeavours being made to address the issue. In this regard reference was made to the 'Porth' platform which provided central access to an array of resources for schools from Welsh Government, Partneriaeth and the Local Authority. The role of the Local Authority and Partneriaeth in information sharing and communication was emphasised to the Committee, in addition to the provision of bespoke, flexible and practical support for schools.

In response to a query from a Member, it was clarified that schools could utilise staff inset days for matters pertaining to their priorities along the curriculum, however an universal training provision was inappropriate as school clusters were at various stages of progress in the development and implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales and therefore schools required access to different training at different times, on a mixed economy approach. Furthermore, it was explained that the new Curriculum for Wales was based upon a core set of skills, ideas and the 'what matters' statements, but with significant emphasis on teaching within the localised context to enhance learning.

A query was raised regarding the impact on the proposed £75k efficiency saving for Partneriaeth within the 2023/24 budget. The Director of Education and Children's Services duly clarified that Carmarthenshire's contribution to Partneriaeth was reduced compared to others as the School Improvement Team was retained locally within the Local Authority. Furthermore, for 2023/24 the core contribution was not required as Partneriaeth would utilise reserves to meet core costs.

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

5. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2023/24 TO 2025/26

[NOTE: Councillors L.M. Davies and A.C. Jones, having earlier declared an interest in this item remained in the meeting during its consideration. Furthermore, at this point, Councillor B.W Jones declared a personal interest on the basis that her son was employed as a Headteacher in a school within the County. Councillor B. Jones remained in the meeting during consideration of the item].

The Committee considered the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26 which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2023/2024 together with indicative figures for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years. The report was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government (WG) on 14 December 2022.

It was emphasised that whilst significant work had already been undertaken in preparing the budget, the report represented an initial position statement which would be updated following the consultation process. Accordingly, Members were reminded that the report had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 09 January 2023 and members of the Committee had attended recent consultation events which had provided an opportunity to analyse and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The report indicated that, after adjustments for WG, identified transfers, the increase in the provisional settlement for Carmarthenshire was 8.5% (£26.432 million). The Aggregate External Finance (AEF) had therefore increased to £338.017 million in 2023/24. Whilst the settlement represented a significant increase to the indicative figure of 3.4%, the financial model forecasted a requirement for £20m savings over the three year Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) period.

Committee's attention was drawn to section 3.5 of the budget strategy whereby an overview of the schools' delegated budgets was provided to Members. It was noted that many service-specific grants would remain at a broadly similar level (cash value) to previous years which would, in reality reduce outputs given the impact of pay awards and general inflation. The Cabinet Member for Resources was however pleased to report that the Additional Learning Needs Transformation Grant and the Pupil Development Grant had been enhanced, and furthermore, WG funding had been provided to flatline the Recruit Recover Retain Standards (RRRS) grant, instead of the planned reduction, and this would enable schools to continue with their post-covid recovery activities.

Reference was made to the independent pay review body's recommendation of a 5% increase for all Teachers which had been accepted by WG; however, it was acknowledged that the National Education Union (NEU) members had voted in favour of industrial action in a bid for a 12% pay uplift. Committee noted that the draft budget included the 1% "catchup" to 5%, however any further increases would be unfunded and represent an additional financial pressure of approximately £1m for every 1% increase in pay.

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

The Committee was advised that the final budget proposals would be presented to the Cabinet mid/late February, which would enable a balanced budget to be presented to County Council on the 1st March 2023. It was however noted that due to the delays in the provisional settlement, and the consequential impact on Welsh Government's budget finalisation, the publication of the final settlement would not be published until the 7th March 2023.

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

In response to a query regarding the utilisation of school reserves for 2022/23, the Director of Corporate Services confirmed that it was possible for the end of year position to be more favourable than forecasted, due to the timings of the grant funding being confirmed by Welsh Government. In this regard, it was clarified that any school-specific grant funding received would be accommodated into the school reserves, should the grant's terms and conditions allow.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential reprofiling of smaller schools whereby it was expressed that further information was required before efficiency savings could be supported in this regard. The Director of Education and Children's Services clarified that the review of the Carmarthenshire's Sustainable

Communities for Learning Programme was underway and was expected to be concluded by the Summer 2023. It was noted that the results of the review would be considered by the Cabinet in due course.

The Director of Corporate Services, in response to a query, confirmed that any Industrial Action undertaken by the NEU members would result in a direct budgetary saving for the Local Authority. Furthermore, it was clarified that no further budget provision would be made in respect of Teacher Pay Awards until the settlement had been finalised.

Following a request for further information regarding the schools which showed a deficit budgetary position as at March 2022, the Director of Education and Children's Services highlighted that myriad of reasons could contribute to a school being in a budget deficit, though the main expenditure for schools related to staffing costs. Furthermore, it was explained that smaller schools would not have much flexibility within their budgets to meet unexpected costs. An assurance was provided to Committee that regular communication and support was provided to schools in an endeavour to address budgetary challenges.

Concerns were expressed in respect of the impact of the proposed elevation in the cost of school meals set out in the Charging Digest, which could lead to a lower uptake in the purchasing of school meals and result in a further deficit to the budgetary position. It was confirmed that the concerns raised by Committee would be fed back to the Cabinet as part of the consultation process prior to the final budget being set by Council on 7th March 2023. The Director of Corporate Services clarified to the Committee that the Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language was responsible for reconciling the fees and charges for the Education and Children's Services division.

In response to a query, the Director of Education and Children's Services explained that an element of the Council's budget would be delegated to schools to manage redundancies and discussions were ongoing to enable schools to better understand the impact of redundancies and become more cost effective. In this regard, Members highlighted that the Governor Training programme would need to be updated to reflect the additional requirement.

A discussion ensued on the current process in place regarding school redundancies and it was reported to Committee that there was no information to indicate a change to Welsh legislation to follow the Scottish model whereby teachers were employed centrally to facilitate the effective management of the workforce in terms of staff movements to meet the needs of schools.

A concern was expressed in relation to the proposed budget reduction for youth support related services. The Head of Strategy and Learner Support confirmed that the Shared Prosperity Fund would provide some financial support for youth support services. The Council was also exploring different ways of providing youth support services in an endeavour to minimise the impact of budgetary reductions on frontline services.

Reference was made to the proposed review of primary schools' footprint to derive efficiency savings of £200k for 2024/25. A Member enquired as to the methodology for selecting schools for closures, together with the potential

number of school closures that would be required to achieve the efficiency savings. The Director of Education and Children's Services clarified that the figure noted was indicative at this stage, pending the outcome of the review; it was however confirmed that savings in the region of £75k - £80k could be generated from each school closure as a result of the premises and running costs.

RESOLVED that:

- 5.1 **The 2023/24 – 2025/26 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;**
- 5.2 **The Charging Digest detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.**

6. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

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

- Corporate Strategy and Education and Children's Services draft Business Plan
- 10 Year Social Services Strategy

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

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 2022/23 municipal year.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee reviewed the list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on 16 March 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. Accordingly, a further Forward Work Planning session would be held on conclusion of the meeting to review the Committee's priorities for 2022/23 in accordance with the Cabinet Forward Work Plan.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on 16 March, 2023 be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 1ST DECEMBER, 2022

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1st December, 2022 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE