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Chair's Foreword



As the Chair of the Committee, I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year.

The Committee continues to consider the ongoing challenges of the Post-Covid Era and the Cost of Living Crisis which impacts on the educational and social needs of our community. The Committee's pre-decision method of scrutiny enables members to influence and respond to actions during the planning and development of policies and strategies as well as to assess performance over relevant service areas. The Committee has also identified its own topics for investigation, and has continued to assess ongoing themes.

During the year the Committee scrutinised progress with the Council's Well-being Objectives, in particular Start Well and Prosperous Communities. The Committee made a representation to Welsh Government regarding meeting the additional costs of providing Universal Free Schools meals across rural areas. In considering the roll-out of the provision across Carmarthenshire, the Committee highlighted the significance of the Pupil Development Grant funding available for schools as parents/guardians were no longer required to apply for free school meals.

In October the Committee considered a synopsis of the eight Strategic Focus Groups which detailed the remit, membership, meeting schedule and reporting mechanisms for each education priority area. The Committee began to review the progress of each of the Focus Groups individually and will continue with a two-year review programme until all the Focus Groups' progress and delivery has been assessed.

Following consideration of the Revenue Budget reports, the Committee considered the UK Government's Austerity Policy to be unsustainable. Representations were made to both the UK and Welsh Government expressing significant concerns regarding funding cuts impacting our children and young people. Members also considered the financial pressures faced by individual schools, and projected deficit balances remain to be of concern. The Committee participated in the consultations on the Modernising Education Programme and the Rising 4s Policy.

The Committee considered reports on School Attendance Levels and Supporting Behaviour across the county's schools. Presentations by Coedcae Comprehensive School and QE High provided case studies on bespoke support and the actions taken to improve pupil attendance. Both these issues will be re-visited by the Committee to track progress and share good practice.

Estyn Report Publications were shared with members to identify emerging issues, and the Estyn Inspection Report of Carmarthenshire's Education Services was considered by the Committee. Members welcomed the positive elements in the report and the three recommendations on areas for improvement will continue to be monitored over the coming year.

During the year the Committee reviewed School Recruitment, Staffing and Supply Staffing Arrangements in the county. A workshop on school federations was held, providing an insight on recruitment and budget implications. The provision of Supply Staff and Cover Supervisors will be further investigated following a pilot scheme within Anglesey Local Authority.

In January the Committee endorsed the promotion of the Childcare Offer for Wales to provide affordable childcare across the county. Members considered the delivery and local statistics in relation to registrations, applications and a fast payment claims service. Our older young people were represented by the Carmarthenshire Youth Council in May. Their presentation championed important issues such as Bullying, Children's Rights, Mental Health, Period Dignity and Domestic Violence, and provided an insight into their role in decision-making - both locally and nationally.

The Committee enjoyed a Christmas highlight with live music from youngsters engaged with the Music Service. The presentation provided an overview of the delivery of the music service within Carmarthenshire County Council, which then informed budgetary considerations in the New Year. Members noted the importance of music education in relation to the personal development of our children and young people.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan was considered by the Committee, with assessments made on progress against the seven outcomes detailed within the Plan. A synopsis of the ongoing work on the Welsh Language Continuum raised concerns regarding recruitment of teachers able to deliver through the medium of Welsh, both locally and nationally. An update on the Welsh for Adults provision was considered and the Committee reviewed the options in terms of the future provision of the Service.

I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their valuable input over the past year in providing an internal and external viewpoint on the effectiveness of the Authority's provision. I would also like to thank Democratic Services and Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Officers for their dedication and professionalism in supporting the work of the Committee. Their preparation for Workshops and Development Sessions in addition to formal Meetings is significant and underpins the work of the Committee across all areas. Diolch yn fawr.

The Committee's agenda over the past year will continue into future work programmes, and some flexibility is provided to allow members to be pro-active as new issues arise. I look forward to continuing to work with Members, Co-opted Members and Officers in the year ahead.

Councillor Carys Jones

Chair of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language 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*".

This report highlights the work undertaken by the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year. It aims to provide members with an opportunity to reflect on its achievements, identify areas of best practice and highlight areas for improvement to further enhance the scrutiny function. Additionally, this report may facilitate discussion on items which could be identified for inclusion within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Councillor Carys Jones 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). Cabinet Members attend meetings as required in order to address the Committee on areas within their respective portfolios.

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 2023/24

2.1 The Role of Scrutiny

Each Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the overview and scrutiny of specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective services. The Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of Cabinet's Education and Welsh Language portfolio and the respective service areas:-

Schools and Education Services from 3 - 19	Regional Integrated School Improvement Service
School Improvement, Organisation and Performance	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum
Education Welfare and Inclusion	Adult Community Learning including Welsh for Adults
School Support and Governor Services	Youth Support Service
Nursery Education and Standards	School Admissions

Young People Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEETS)	Behavioural Services
Regional Consortia (Partneriaeth is currently within the Leader Portfolio. Any future education consortia embarked upon would form part of the Education and Welsh Language Portfolio).	School Attendance
Carmarthenshire's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme	Education data and systems
Additional Learning Needs	Play Sufficiency Assessment
Development of the Welsh Language / Standards reporting	Music Service
Healthy Schools	School Catering Services
Estyn	Post 16 Education & Funding and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership
Educational Psychology	Schools Safeguarding and Attendance Team
Education and Wellbeing Team	

In accordance with its areas of responsibilities, the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee will seek to:-

- Examine how well the Cabinet and Council are performing;
- Hold the Cabinet to account and seek to promote open and transparent decision-making;
- Monitor the performance of the Council's services and functions;
- Review decisions made by the Cabinet where appropriate;
- Assist the Cabinet in the development, monitoring and review of policy;
- Scrutinise, as a key element of the consultation process, the proposed revenue budget strategy and capital investment programmes;
- Enable the participation of external organisations and partners in consideration of issues that may impact upon the delivery of Council and countywide priorities.

2.2 The Forward Work Plan

Scrutiny plays a key role in promoting accountability in the decision-making process of the Local Authority. It is also useful in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging partnership working with external agencies.

Scrutiny Committees operate a pre-decision method of scrutiny which enables the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee to take ownership of its Forward Work Plan and determine which reports from the Cabinet Forward Work Plan it wishes to consider. Scrutiny Committees may also identify their own topics, relevant to their remit, for review; furthermore, the Cabinet may invite relevant Scrutiny Committees to scrutinise a decision which was in the pipeline.

The Committee utilised the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny's Gateway framework to develop its Forward Work Plan for the 2023/24 municipal year which was reviewed on a regular basis. This provided a manageable, flexible, and robust approach to scrutiny and

ensured that the areas for review were considered on a priority basis and in a timely manner.

In this regard, the Committee determined that periodic reports in relation to performance and budget monitoring be circulated to members outside the formal meeting programme. This process enabled any relevant matters identified by members to be placed on the formal agenda for further consideration, as appropriate. The benefits of such an approach led to an improved level of debate and input during Scrutiny Committee meetings. In the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the Forward Work Plan.

2.3 Meetings of the Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee

Meetings are scheduled periodically to consider issues and reports included in its Forward Work Plan. The Committee held 5 formal meetings during the 2023/24 municipal year and all meetings were conducted in accordance with the provisions set out within Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

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

2.4 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

One of the principal roles of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee is to monitor the performance of services and functions within its remit. Accordingly, the Committee reviews performance monitoring reports and various strategies and plans to provide a balanced assessment of performance across the relevant service areas.

2.4.1 Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report 2022/23

In September 2023 the Committee received for consideration the Council's Annual Report 2022/23 on the Council's Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 which had been produced in accordance with the relevant provisions within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021. The report detailed the progress made with the Council's Well-being Objectives (WBO), together with the Council's self-assessment against the performance requirements of the previous financial year. The Committee focused upon the Service and Thematic priorities falling within its remit within the following Well-being Objectives:

- WBO 1:** Enabling our children and young people to have the best possible start in life (Start Well).
- WBO 3:** Enabling our communities and environment to be healthy, safe and prosperous (Prosperous Communities).

Outcome:

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 30 October 2023, took consideration of all feedback received and recommended to Council that the Annual Report 2022/23 be approved. The Council subsequently adopted the report at its meeting held on 8th November 2023.

2.4.2 Draft Divisional Delivery Plans 2023/24

In January 2024 the Committee received for consideration the draft Divisional Services Delivery Plans relevant to the Education & Children's Services Directorate for 2023/24, as follows:-

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

These 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. This provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider and comment upon the priorities outlined for the Division.

In considering the report the Committee acknowledged that whilst Welsh Government had increased the Universal Free School Meal value from £2.90 to £3.20, the amount did not reflect the true cost to the Authority for the provision of high quality, nutritious school meals to all primary schools.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the Draft Divisional Service Delivery Plans 2024/25 relevant to the Education and Children's Services directorate.

The Committee made representations to Welsh Government seeking bespoke financing levels to be applied across different counties to meet the additional costs incurred by rural areas. A response was provided by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language confirming that funding for the delivery of school meals is provided to local authorities through the Revenue Support Grant, which is allocated and distributed using a methodology that acknowledges sparsity in different areas of Wales. Furthermore, it was clarified that the additional grant funding to support the expansion of universal free school meals to all primary school children by September 2024 had been provided following a review of primary school meal costs in Wales undertaken with Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) in 2023.

2.4.3 10 Year Social Services Strategy

A request was made by the Committee to review the 10 year Social Services Strategy which aimed to provide a vision on how the Council would provide the statutory social services functions over the next decade. This report was initially planned to be received by Committee in October 2023 and subsequently in December 2023, January 2024 and March 2024. Unfortunately, the strategy has not yet been finalised and therefore the report will be delayed until 2024/25.

2.4.4 2023/24 Performance Reports relevant to the Committee

In accordance with the protocols established by the Committee, quarterly performance monitoring reports relevant to the Committee's remit were circulated by email to members as follows:-

- January 2024 – Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring 2023/24
- April 2024 – Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring 2023/24

The information provided a self-evaluation of performance in accordance with the reformed legislative framework enshrined within Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Members were afforded the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration at the Committee's formal meeting, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

Outcome:-

The reports enabled members to monitor performance in respect of the Well-being Objectives relevant to the Committee's remit and aligned to the Authority's Corporate Strategy.

2.4.5 Strategic Focus Groups

The Committee considered a report in October 2023 which summarised the delivery of the Education Service's business objectives through a series of collaborative Strategic Focus Groups (SFG). The report provided a synopsis of the 8 SFGs which had been aligned to each of the departmental priority areas and detailed the remit, membership, meeting schedule and reporting mechanisms for each group.

Outcome:-

The Committee resolved to consider periodic progress updates which would review each of the Strategic Focus Groups.

2.4.6 Update on Estyn Report Publications

Correspondence detailing the latest relevant Estyn report publications was circulated to the Committee by email in June 2023, October 2023, December 2023, January 2024, April 2024 and May 2024 in respect of its inspection and thematic reports pertaining to education and training.

Outcome:-

The reports appraised the Committee to of developments/emerging issues and provided an opportunity for members to raise any matters for further consideration.

2.4.7 Actions and Referrals

During the course of the municipal year, requests for additional items were made by members of the Committee to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role. Biannual updates on Actions and Referrals were presented to the Committee at its meetings held in June 2023 and December 2023 which detailed the progress made in relation to these requests.

2.5 Revenue & Capital Budgets

2.5.1 Budget Monitoring Reports

In accordance with the protocols established by the Committee, quarterly reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets were circulated to members as follows:-

- June 2023 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 28th February 2023;
- October 2023 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 30th June 2023;
- December 2023 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st August 2023.
- January 2024 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st October 2023
- April 2024 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st December 2023 and
- May 2024 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st March 2024.

The reports enabled members to monitor expenditure in each service area and the progress made in connection with any capital works. Members were afforded the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration at the Committee's formal meeting, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

2.5.2 Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2022/23

In addition to monitoring the current revenue and capital budgets, the Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2022/23 was also circulated to the Committee in October 2023 which provided the Committee with an end of year financial position. The summary position showed that the Education & Children's Service reported a net variance of -£838k against its approved budget. In respect of the savings report, a total of £379k of the Managerial savings against a target of £388k was delivered. Policy savings of £150k put forward for 2022/23 were undelivered.

2.5.3 Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27

At its meeting in January 2024 the Committee was consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2024/25, together with indicative figures for the 2025/2026 and 2026/27 financial years.

The Committee considered the UK Government's Austerity policy to be unsustainable, and it was expressed that the Welsh Government's subsequent settlement could not provide for the future wellbeing of children and young people. Accordingly, whilst the Committee accepted the strategy within the current financial climate, representations were made to both the UK and Welsh Government expressing significant concerns regarding unpreventable funding cuts which were considered to deprive a generation of children and young people within Carmarthenshire of the best possible opportunities in life. A request was also made for the UK Government and Welsh Government to resolve the mechanism for funding teachers' pension increases, and to provide assurance that adequate funding would be properly distributed to Local Authorities.

Outcome:

As part of the Authority's widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27, the Committee considered the Strategy and endorsed the budget proposals, as submitted. The Budget Strategy was subsequently adopted by the Cabinet and Council at their meetings in February 2024, subject to some amendments.

The Minister for Education and Welsh Language responded to the Committee's representations in respect of its concerns and dissatisfaction for the proposed budget allocation for schools and teachers pay awards. The correspondence detailed the funding methodology for pre-16 provision in schools in Wales and, in acknowledging the challenging financial context, noted that the Welsh Government's budget was worth up to £1.3bn less in real terms than when it was set in 2021.

Nevertheless, an assurance was provided that following the recent UK Government announcement that it would be increasing its local government settlement, the consequential allocation to local government would, in part, be utilised to support pressures in education, including teachers' pay. Furthermore, it was confirmed that for 2024-25 the amalgamation of pre-16 local authority education grants provided the same level of funding against similar grants provided to local authorities in 2023-24 which reflected a 3.2% rise against the 2024-25 indicative budget for those same grants.

Regarding teacher pensions, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language confirmed that Welsh Government was seeking urgent confirmation from the UK Government that these costs would be met in full, and would be applicable to all unfunded public service pension schemes.

2.5.4 School Budgets

In October 2023 the Committee received for consideration a schools budget report which provided an update on the Authority's end of financial year position as at 31 March 2023 for primary, secondary and special schools within Carmarthenshire. Comparable figures were also reviewed for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

The Committee was appraised of the main financial pressures faced by schools, which were, in the main, attributable to staffing costs. It was also recognised that school budgets were determined in accordance with the general funding formula for schools and based upon pupil numbers. A synopsis of the ongoing support mechanisms offered to schools was also provided to the Committee, which comprised a 'Change Review Panel' whereby ideas for savings were explored with representatives from education services, Human Resources and Finance.

Outcome:-

The Committee acknowledged that the issue of school deficits was further compounded by building maintenance costs, whereby the existing budget provision was considered insufficient to meet the cost of repairs. Accordingly, the cumulative deficit balances in future years remained a concern and a significant risk to the Authority which would need to be considered as part of the Modernising Education Programme.

The Committee requested a further update on school budgets to be presented for consideration as part of its Forward Work Plan for 2024/25.

2.6 Education

2.6.1 Supporting Behaviour

In June 2023 the Committee reviewed the current situation in relation to supporting improved behaviour across the county's schools. The introduction of a Four Phase Model of Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing Support provided equitable and consistent behaviour support services across the county. The Committee welcomed the £500k funding provided to secondary schools to support implementation of the Four Phase Model which included upskilling schools and staff to meet the needs of learners, provision of 'in school' support for staff and learners, specialist Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), support within 'educated other than at school' (EOTAS) and the provision of bespoke support for some of the most vulnerable learners in the Local Authority.

The Committee thereupon received a detailed presentation from Coedcae Comprehensive School which focussed on the way in which the school had created a culture of safeguarding which provided highly effective, bespoke support to ensure the well-being of pupils and to meet the needs of those with additional learning needs. The interventions and initiatives undertaken by the school had resulted in positive added value whereby vulnerable pupils had exceeded the expected national levels of progress, standards, and educational outcomes.

Outcome:-

The Committee was provided with an insight into the prevalence of behavioural issues across schools, and gained an awareness of the range of programmes of support in place for learners using the ethos of inclusive practices and restorative approaches to encourage positive relationships between teachers, pupils and parents/guardians.

2.6.2 School Attendance Levels

In June 2023 the Committee received for consideration a report which detailed the levels of attendance across Carmarthenshire schools since 2012. The significant adverse impact on school attendance brought about by the coronavirus pandemic was highlighted to the Committee, with schools experiencing difficulties in re-engaging with learners and families. Attendance across Carmarthenshire schools remained lower than pre-pandemic levels, with illness accounting for the majority of absences.

The report set out the Local Authority support provided to schools to improve and maintain good pupil attendance by way of advisory and operational work and was supplemented by statistical data to demonstrate the impact of such interventions.

Outcome:

The Committee gained an insight into the range of alternative offers introduced by the Authority to re-engage pupils by way of appropriate, bespoke packages of support and intervention strategies.

The Committee endorsed the behaviour and attendance marketing campaigns by the Authority to convey the importance of regular school attendance to parents and guardians.

2.6.3 Estyn Inspection of Carmarthenshire's Education Services

In October 2023 the Committee received for consideration the outcome of the Estyn inspection of Carmarthenshire's Education Services undertaken in July 2023 in accordance with the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework.

The inspection covered 3 main areas pertaining to outcomes, education services and leadership & management and concluded that Carmarthenshire's education services was being led robustly by senior leaders and elected members, who shared a clear vision for education within the authority. The inspection further identified productive working relationships with schools and other providers, with valuable and purposeful school improvement processes in place.

The Committee considered the areas for improvement which had culminated in a total of 3 recommendations in respect of improving pupils' attendance in the Authority's schools, strengthening school improvement processes, particularly for secondary schools and refining approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning.

In considering the areas for improvement set out within the report, the Committee was appraised of the progress made in response to each recommendation and was assured to note that work had already begun to address aspects of the recommendations prior to the inspection as they had already been identified via the Authority's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. The Committee acknowledged the clear commitment towards improving pupil attendance within the Authority, with progress already achieved in many schools. It was suggested that support could be provided to the education service to address this national issue by way of a partnership approach involving key stakeholders.

Outcomes:

The Committee welcomed the positive judgements set out within the report which provided a clear focus for the Authority in moving forward with the provision of educational services for Carmarthenshire.

The Committee held two workshops during the municipal period to support the Authority in improving school attendance levels by way of a review of the available data, provision of feedback and identification of best practice to inform the Education and Children's Services strategy in going forward.

2.6.4 Primary School Admissions Review (Rising 4's Policy)

The Committee, at its meeting in October 2023, received for consideration a report which reviewed the Authority's primary school admission arrangements and which had been prepared in response to the recommendations emanating from the Task and Finish Review of the current provision for early years education, childcare and play opportunities undertaken by the Committee in 2018/19.

The report provided an overview of the current arrangements for nursery and full-time admissions to primary schools in Carmarthenshire, together with a research-based comparison of full-time and part-time admission arrangements with all other Local Authorities in Wales. In this regard, it was confirmed that Carmarthenshire was the only Authority in Wales with a 'rising 4s' policy. The report outlined the challenges faced in relation to accommodation and school capacity, inconsistency with other Authorities, nursery and early years provision, funding and the admissions process itself.

The Committee considered the potential implications of any changes to current arrangements in terms of parental perception, equity of provision, redistribution of funding and consultation requirements.

Outcome:

The feedback provided by the Committee in respect of the Primary School Admissions Review (Rising 4s) was forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration.

Subsequently, the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 25 March 2024, resolved that Carmarthenshire, as the Admissions Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled primary schools, proceed to remove the Rising 4s Policy and implement Option B (as detailed in the report) from 1st September 2025 i.e. to admit full time learners to primary schools in the school term following their fourth birthday.

2.6.5 Review of Supply Staff Arrangements in Carmarthenshire

In December 2023 the Committee considered a report which detailed the current Supply Staff arrangements across Carmarthenshire schools. The report had been requested to review the cost effectiveness of the current external provision and to explore the potential viability of an in-house service provision.

The report set out the current arrangements, costings and potential alternative models for the provision of supply staff. In this regard, Committee was interested to note that the Welsh Government would be implementing a National Supply Pool with a digital platform in an endeavour to develop options for a sustainable model of supply teaching with fair work across Wales. It was noted that implementation would be on a staggered approach following analysis of the pilot within Anglesey Local Authority.

The Committee acknowledged that initial analysis suggested that none of the alternative models detailed within the report would result in savings to schools or the Authority. However, a change of approach to covering short-term teacher absences with a Cover Supervisor could generate some efficiencies with minimum impact on pupils and their learning. Accordingly, it was expressed that the way forward should incorporate a combined approach, with improved absence management processes to reduce the amount of supply cover needed, together with cost effective supply cover.

Outcome:

The Committee resolved to consider a further update following completion of the pilot study undertaken at Anglesey Local Authority.

It was also agreed that the comments and observations made by the Committee in respect of the review of supply staff arrangements within Carmarthenshire Council be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration.

2.6.6 School Recruitment and Staffing Update

The Committee, at its meeting in December 2023, considered a report which provided an update on the current position in respect of recruitment and retention in schools. The report set out statistics for the county, together with comparable figures at a national level pertaining to the recruitment and retention of teachers, the number of Welsh language medium teachers, the number of students applying for and completing Post Graduate Certificates in Welsh and English and an overview of the current leadership context.

In reviewing the report, a synopsis of the array of measures being explored to address the significant challenges was provided to the Committee in the context of professional development programmes, marketing campaigns and the recruitment process within the Council. Detailed consideration was given to the overarching recommendations set out in the report.

Outcome:

The comments and observations made by the Committee in respect of the recruitment and retention in schools was noted by the Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language and the Director of Education and Children's Services.

The Committee held a workshop on school federations in March 2024 which provided members with a greater understanding on how federations operate, the reasons for doing so and the impact. In this regard the Committee had insight into school federations and the correlation between recruitment and budget implications within the context of the Modernising Education Programme.

2.6.7 Music Service

In December 2023 the Committee received for consideration a report which provided an overview of the statutory and non-statutory delivery of the music service within Carmarthenshire County Council, together with the positive impact on personal and societal levels.

The report detailed the array of benefits derived from music education and noted its importance within the context of the Curriculum for Wales and the National Plan for Music Education. Furthermore, the Committee was appraised of the range of support offered to both primary and secondary schools via an annual Service Level Agreement for a wide range of disciplines, in addition to the corporate and community support provided by the music service annually. The Committee was pleased to note that no charges were levied upon pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) for music service tuition and the loan of instruments which ensured equality of opportunity for all pupils.

Consideration was given to the future plans for community support which included opportunities to work with the Adult and Community Learning team to provide opportunities for learners of all ages and engage greater with the generic public.

Outcome:

The Committee commended the music service provision within the Council for its sterling contribution to the development of learners across Carmarthenshire and emphasised the importance of music education for several reasons, including health and wellbeing, confidence building, cultural appreciation, cognitive development and creativity.

2.6.8 UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS

The Committee, at its meeting in May 2024, 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. 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.

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 Committee noted with interest that the 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.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the actions undertaken to implement the Universal Primary School Free School Meals (UPFSM) provision across Carmarthenshire within the Welsh Government target dates.

The Committee agreed to consider an update report in due course on Welsh Government Funding Streams.

2.7 Young People

2.7.1 Update on the Childcare Offer for Wales

At its meeting in January 2024, the Committee received for consideration an update report on the Childcare Offer for Wales, the aim of which was to support families with the

provision of high quality, flexible and affordable childcare to promote economic regeneration, reduce pressures on family income and help parents to participate in work, thereby reducing a family's risk of poverty. The scheme, introduced in January 2019, was funded by Welsh Government for eligible parents and sought to enhance the wellbeing of children with the provision of positive and rich childcare experiences.

A synopsis of the delivery of the scheme was provided to the Committee, which included the introduction of a National Childcare Offer digital service in Summer 2022 to provide a streamlined and uniformed registration and application process, and a weekly fast payment claims service for providers.

The report set out statistics for the number of applications approved and detailed the support available for additional learning needs by way of the Additional Support Grant (ASG) provided by Welsh Government. The Committee also reviewed the payments made to Carmarthenshire Childcare Providers which represented a considerable saving for many local working families and helped to sustain local childcare providers, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic.

Outcome:

The progress report was received.

The Committee endorsed the robust marketing and communications strategy to promote the scheme in a consistent manner and the endeavours to reducing barriers to access the scheme in accordance with its aims and objectives.

2.7.2 Update on the work of the Carmarthenshire Youth Council

The Committee, at its meeting in May 2024, considered an update on the work of the Carmarthenshire Youth Council (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.

Outcome:

The Committee gained an insight into the array of project work undertaken by the CYC to champion important issues such as Bullying, Childrens Rights, Mental Health, Period Dignity and Domestic Violence. Furthermore, the Committee gained an awareness of 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.

2.8 The Welsh Language

2.8.1 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan – Annual Report

The Committee received for consideration the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) Annual Report which detailed the progress made during the 2022/23 academic year in implementing the authority's 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (2022-2032).

The Committee reviewed the Authority's action plan which set out the progress made against the 7 outcomes detailed within the WESP to facilitate more nursery and reception children being taught through the medium of Welsh; more young people studying for qualifications in Welsh as a subject, and subjects through the medium of Welsh; increasing provision of Welsh medium education for learners with Additional Learning Needs; and increasing the number of teachers able to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh.

A synopsis of the ongoing work to transition schools to the Welsh Government's new linguistic categorisation system was also set out in the report, together with an overview of the current position in terms of the Welsh Language Development Team, Standards, Partnership Working, Grant funding and future developments.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the low number of teachers able to deliver classes through the medium of Welsh. Accordingly, an overview of the initiatives implemented to meet the objective of increasing the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh as a subject and through the medium of Welsh, and the role of external agencies was provided within the context of the ongoing national teacher recruitment difficulties. An update on the Welsh for Adults provision was also provided.

Outcome:

At the request of the Committee, an update on the Welsh for Adults provision was considered at the Development Session held in February 2024. The Committee reviewed the options available to the Authority in this regard and provided feedback in terms of the future provision of the Service.

A further update on the Welsh for Adults provision will be considered by the Committee during 2024/25.

3. Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task & Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task and Finish review during 2023/24.

3.2 Site Visits

In April 2024 the Committee undertook Site Visits to Cefneithin and Gorslas Primary Schools. The visits provided the Committee with an insight into the impact of the learning environment upon the development of pupils.

Outcome:

Further Site Visits will be held in 2024/25 which will facilitate the Committee in its consideration of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP).

3.3 Development Sessions

During the 2023/24 municipal year, Committee Members were invited to the following development sessions/seminars facilitated by the Authority:

Date	Development Session / Seminar
21/06/23	Housing Repairs
07/08/23	Hywel Dda University Health Board – Consultation on Urgent and Emergency Children and Young People Services at Withybush and Glangwili Hospitals
13/09/23	Tackling Poverty Support
08/11/23	Treasury Management
22/11/23	I.C.T Digital Strategy and Artificial Intelligence
30/11/23	Geodiscoverer Training
06/12/23	Place and Infrastructure – Service Updates
07/12/23	Geodiscoverer Training
08/12/23	Digital Transformation
09/01/24	Artificial Intelligence and Digital Strategy
January 24	Various Budget Consultations
23/02/24	Anti Racism Training (also 26/04 & 07/03)
06/03/24	Flooding Responsibility
08/05/24	Corporate Safeguarding

In addition to the above Corporate Development sessions / seminars, the Committee also held the following bespoke sessions:

Date	Development Session / Seminar
08/02/24 and 21/02/24	<u>School Attendance</u> Two school attendance workshops were held following the recommendation made by Estyn within this area as part of its inspection of the Authority's education services. The Committee sought to support Education Services in improving school attendance levels by way of a review of the available data and identification of best practice. School representatives from QE High

	<p>attended the workshop to provide case studies on the actions taken to improve pupil attendance.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <p>The verbal feedback provided to Officers at the workshops assisted in shaping the education service’s strategy in going forward.</p>
20/03/24	<p><u>School Federations</u></p> <p>The development session set out the framework for the implementation of school federations, together with the advantages and disadvantages of federations. School representatives from Cwrt Henri / Ffairfach / Talley federation and the Trimsaran / Ffwrnes federation attended the session to share experiences and enable the Committee to compare hard and soft federations.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <p>The development session provided the Committee with an insight into how federations operate, the reasons for doing so and its impact. This understanding will assist the Committee during its consideration of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP).</p>
10/05/24	<p><u>Review of processes regarding the transfer of pupils between schools</u></p> <p>The development session set out the context arrangements and costings associated with transferring pupils into county placements from outside and between schools within the county.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <p>The Committee gained a greater understanding of the process and provided verbal feedback to Officers to inform the Authority’s proposed new policies in relation to Managed Moves and Fair Access protocol.</p>

4. Impact

4.1 How has Scrutiny Made a Difference This Year?

The majority of decisions made by the Authority are made by the Cabinet. Scrutiny offers the other 65 non-executive Councillors an opportunity to influence those decisions and act as a “critical friend”. Pre-decision Scrutiny is particularly influential in this regard as it provides Scrutiny Committees with the opportunity to consider and comment upon policies and emerging issues before they are considered by Cabinet. Scrutiny also assists in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies.

Scrutiny plays a key role in improving the services used by the people and children of Carmarthenshire. The scrutiny function is also useful in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership

working with external bodies. The involvement of local residents, community organisations and partners is an important part of the scrutiny process and Councillors are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents.

Pre-decision Scrutiny affords all Scrutiny Committees the opportunity of providing input before the reports are considered by Cabinet and this is the voice of the people. During the 2023/24 municipal year, the Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee has made a positive impact in many ways, including:-

- Contributing to the Primary School Admissions Review to inform the Authority's strategy going forward.
- Supporting the Authority in its endeavours to improve school attendance levels by way of a review of the available data, provision of feedback and identification of best practice to inform the Authority's future policies.
- Contributing to the development of the Authority's proposed new policies in relation to Managed Moves and Fair Access protocol.
- Providing comments and observations to inform the future strategy and provision of the Welsh for Adults service.
- Undertaking its role as "gatekeepers" and ensuring that the budgetary issues are being addressed and managed effectively.
- Reviewing the Authority's arrangements and ambitious priorities to ensure that the children, young people and learners of all ages within Carmarthenshire are happy, safe, and thriving, and fulfilling their personal, social and learning potential.

5. Public Engagement

The Scrutiny function provides the opportunity for public participation in the Authority's activities whereby members of the public can request items to be placed on the Committee's meeting agenda. Carmarthenshire residents, or those who own a business or are employed within the county are also permitted to ask questions at meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Whilst the Committee did not receive any suggestions of possible topics from members of the public during 2023/24, the Committee's Forward Work Plan included a range of topics which required public consultation/participation.

In order to promote public awareness of Scrutiny Committees and the ability of the public to put forward topics for discussion, the Forward Work Plans of the Authority's 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>

During the municipal year, the Authority's Communications division provided digital marketing support to the Scrutiny function and proactively promoted details of forthcoming items which may be of interest to the public in an attempt to raise public awareness and

participation. The public are invited, via a number of different avenues, to get involved in the Scrutiny process and to highlight any issues of concern.

6. Challenges

The Education and Children's Services department continued to be under pressure throughout the municipal year as a result of budgetary constraints and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, the department has adapted and developed innovative solutions during unprecedented circumstances to meet the needs of children and young people across Carmarthenshire. The Committee has continued to be constructive in its role in scrutinising performance which has facilitated the department and positively contributed to policies and decisions. It has been a balancing act for the Committee in undertaking its scrutiny duty without impacting on the resourcing of front-line services.

7. Future Work

While the Authority is still in a period of recovery following the coronavirus pandemic, it is evident that the Committee has made significant progress during the municipal year 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 Governance and Scrutiny in order to achieve a streamlined and focused scrutiny process.

The work of the Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year will be considered by the Committee at a development planning session and will be regularly reviewed as part of the monitoring of the Forward Work Plan during the course of the year.

In order to enhance the Authority's Scrutiny function, members will continue to attend development sessions, seek officers' advice where appropriate and make full use of informal pre-meeting discussion.

8. Support for the Scrutiny Function

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

- formulating and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings in accordance with the Forward Work Plans;
- 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 members of the Council and its officers;
- managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire by engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny

- with the Cabinet;
- advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, as and when guidance is published;
- managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Plans 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 Plans, Task & Finish reports and Annual Reports, please 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.

9. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of five meetings were held during the reporting period.

Scrutiny Committee Member	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Sue Allen	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Liam Bowen	3 [of 5]	60%
Cllr. Kim Broom	4 [of 5]	80%
Cllr. Lewis Davies*	3 [of 4]	75%
Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Betsan Jones	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Carys Jones	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Dot Jones	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Hefin Jones	4 [of 5]	80%
Cllr. Jean Lewis	4 [of 5]	80%
Cllr. Sean Rees	4 [of 5]	80%
Cllr. Edward Skinner	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Michael Thomas*	4 [of 4]	100%
Cllr. Janet Williams*	1 [of 1]	100%

Parent Governor Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Ashley Butcher*	2 [of 2]	100%
Mr Anthony Enoch	5 [of 5]	100%
Mrs Felicity Healy-Benson*	2 [of 2]	100%
Church Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Ms Mari Hughes	1 [of 1]	100%
Mrs Vera Kenny	5 [of 5]	100%
Rev Delyth Richards**	0 [of 4]	0%

Substitutes	Meetings Attended
Cllr. Mansel Charles	1
Cllr. Michelle Donoghue	1
Cllr. Alex Evans	1

Cabinet Member	Meetings Attended
Cllr. Glynog Davies (Education and the Welsh Language)	5 [of 5]
Cllr. Alun Lenny (Resources)	1 [of 1]

***Notes:**

Cllr Lewis Davies was not a member of the committee at the meeting held on 09.10.2023

Cllr Michael Thomas member until 31.01.2024

Mari Hughes replaced Rev Delyth Richards on 08.02.2024

Ashley Butcher term of office from October 2023 to 31.03.2024

Dr Felicity Healey-Benson member until 30.09.2023

Cllr Janet Williams member from 08.05.2024