

# EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL, 2021

**PRESENT:** Councillor D. Price [Chair]

**Councillors:**

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

**Co-opted Members:**

A. Enoch - Parent Governor  
Rev D. Richards - Church in Wales Representative

**Also in attendance:**

Councillor G. Davies - Executive Board Member for Education & Children

**The following Officers were in attendance:**

G. Morgans – Director of Education & Children’s Services  
S. Davies - Head of Access to Education  
A. Rees - Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing  
A. Thomas - Head of Education and Inclusion Services  
C. Griffiths - Welsh Language Development Manager  
A. James - Educational Support Adviser  
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer  
E. Bryer - Democratic Services Officer  
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator  
J. Corner - Technical Officer

**Virtual Meeting : 10.00 am - 12.05 pm**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Mrs V. Kenny, Roman Catholic Church representative.

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

Member	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Cllr. Dot Jones	4. Curriculum for Wales	Her husband is a lecturer at the University of Wales Trinity St. David.

There were no declarations of party whips.

**3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

#### 4. CURRICULUM FOR WALES

[NOTE: Councillor D. Jones had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

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.

The Authority is developing a professional learning proposal for the Curriculum for Wales that complements the work of the Inclusion Team, the aim of which is to ensure that a good pedagogy meets the needs of individual pupils at all levels and that schools effectively progress in line with the aims of the National Mission. In addition, Education Support Advisers and officers from the Inclusion, Behaviour and Educational Psychologists Teams hold ongoing constructive conversations with individual schools to discuss progress with the transition to the Curriculum for Wales, as well as the Additional Learning Needs transition.

The report provided details of the nature of support being provided and proposed additional/alternative strategic approaches to enhance the current provision including the following:-

- ❖ the current context and schools' engagement with the new curriculum to date;
- ❖ the strategic approach of the Education & Children's Services department;
- ❖ the support available to schools and specialist settings;
- ❖ the engagement of schools and specialist settings;
- ❖ questions for governors as they support their schools on this journey;
- ❖ the Research and Professional Learning networks;
- ❖ expectations;
- ❖ the role of ERW.

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

- Asked what are the short and long term plans with regard to ERW, the Director explained that this term four Local Authorities are still working in partnership and are still full members of ERW – Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea and Powys. Whilst Neath Port Talbot and Ceredigion have left the partnership, an agreement has been reached to continue to provide some services to them, mainly leadership programmes. The intention now is for ERW to come to an end on 31st August of this year with a new partnership starting on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2021. The provision and support will continue to be provided by the new partnership but from September on that provision could potentially be more local, pending the outcome of discussions taking place at the moment. More information regarding the new structure will be shared with new partners soon and hopefully officers will be in a position to provide further details to the Committee at the next meeting. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing added that the Curriculum Team within ERW have been working hard to support schools through this transitional phase;
- Reference was made to the important role that governors have in this

process and officers were asked how the Authority will ensure that support is provided consistently and fairly to all schools throughout the county. How will Governors know to what extent the staff at their schools have taken part in virtual training courses and how much the staff understand about the challenges ahead etc. The Executive Board Member for Education & Children agreed that it is important for governors to keep their finger on the pulse. Training sessions will be held for governors in September to help them know what sort of questions they should be asking their headteachers. The Director added that all schools should have a School Development Plan which will include the curriculum as one of its priorities and a focus for development. He acknowledged that there is still some work to be done on the evaluation process for the new curriculum which he was sure would be in place in time for September 2022;

- Asked for an example of the new way of teaching compared to the old way, the Educational Support Adviser explained that it was mainly to do with building relationships with children and getting them to contribute in the classroom. The Director added that it was about moving from a set curriculum where you tick boxes for content covered to a curriculum which suits the learners' needs including local history, local culture etc.;
- Concern was expressed over the risk that some schools might continue to use the existing curriculum instead of embracing the new curriculum. The Executive Board Member stressed how important it is to ensure that our schools are brave and look to the future. Communication skills are so important and so we must build children's confidence to speak publicly. There is more emphasis on digital working and learning which is going to develop and will be a very important factor in education in the future not just during a pandemic. Distance learning will be with us and we need to ensure that our children have the necessary skills;
- With regard to concerns that some schools may not embrace the new curriculum, officers were asked how this will be monitored and how will we ensure that best practice is shared throughout the county. The Educational Support Adviser informed the Committee that information is collected from all schools constantly. It was difficult to undertake any assessments during lockdown, however, any examples of best practice are shared with all schools. Additional support is provided for any schools where it is required. The Director added that it was essential to ensure that all schools have the support required to make sure that they are on the right path and are ready for September 2022, which will be the priority for the team;
- Concern was expressed in relation to the pressure currently on schools due to the problems caused by the pandemic and the significant additional pressure of having to deal with one of the most major changes to education in the last 20 years happening at the same time. More needs to be done to support schools especially the smaller schools who do not have the resources. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing explained that the new curriculum could be used as a pre-cursor and a vehicle out of the pandemic and could provide a blueprint and framework to build support for learners' recovery. It was important to be pragmatic in terms of what is achievable by September 2021 and officers were liaising with the Inspectorate in that respect in light of the interruption to their transition year. He added that it was important to concentrate on getting the vision right first before moving on;
- Concern was expressed that schools are stressing over what Estyn

inspections are going to look like. The Head of Curriculum & Wellbeing informed the Committee that this should have been the transition year, however, the Inspectorate halted inspection for the vast majority of schools. The Director added that conversations have been held over the past few weeks with Estyn and WG regarding resuming school inspections and what schools should expect. Estyn will look at how schools have adapted to and dealt with COVID, however, they will be supportive of any schools piloting new approaches to school curriculum design and implementation as well and that will be part of the inspection process. It will be about how schools are evolving and developing in readiness for September;

- Reference was made to school development plans and the fact that they vary in quality across Wales. Officers were asked if an opportunity existed here to track these plans and ensure consistency across the county and aim for high standards. Challenge Advisers do good work but can they ensure that all Governing Bodies have feedback regarding what has worked and what hasn't worked etc. The Director explained that the WG are working on a new plan in relation to school improvement which clearly outlines the responsibilities of all concerned including governors, the Local Authority and WG. He stressed that there is a monitoring process in place locally with regard to School Improvement Plans.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.**

## **5. DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN**

The Committee received the Education & Children's Services departmental business plan 2021/22 which indicated how the service supports the delivery of the Corporate Strategy.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the plan presented was an abbreviated version without the review section as this was covered in the service COVID-19 Impact Assessments previously submitted to the Committee for consideration.

It was noted that the impact of the pandemic and Brexit created a lot of uncertainty in future planning and consequently the business plan was subject to change.

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

- Reference was made to the table on page 51 of the agenda pack and officers were asked why there was no mention of the environment as surely there were impacts for the department e.g. Safe Routes to School. The Executive Board Member stressed that the environment is an important factor in education. The Director explained that the relevant boxes are only ticked if there is a dedicated action for the department in the Wellbeing Plan. The department does contribute towards many aspects of environmental work within our schools. He added that he would liaise with relevant officers regarding the reporting of that particular objective, including the key actions and measures;
- Reference was made to the statement in the plan that post 16 provision will be reviewed in order to create a sustainable provision and concern was expressed that this suggested that the provision does not currently exist. The Director explained that a review of post 16 provision available was

undertaken when it became apparent that the numbers in the 6<sup>th</sup> form in some schools are not sustainable and cannot therefore offer the range of subjects required. The Head of Curriculum & Wellbeing added that post 16 provision is a key area as it provides the transition from statutory education to further education to the workplace and a lot of work is being done in this area. A report will be presented to the Committee on this subject in the near future;

- Reference was made to the ability of communities to use school facilities and the challenges involved and officers were asked what progress has been made with the model agreement. The Head of Access to Education explained that with regard to making best use of facilities to support wider community activity, officers were currently trying to make sure that there are appropriate leases in place to protect both the schools and the Local Authority;
- Reference was made to the fact that some concerns have previously been raised with regard to the terms in relation to the Mutual Investment Model (MIM) and officers were asked if the Committee would be receiving an update addressing those concerns. The Head of Access to Education explained that any project identified for MIM would need approval and would be reported to the Scrutiny Committee;
- With regard to the Children's Services Divisional Plan, reference was made to the fact that the percentages included in the report don't actually provide any information. The Director explained that they are not actions but rather statutory targets which are reported to WG on a regular basis. He added that the targets are used for measures so it was just a formatting issue which he would ensure is addressed;
- Concern was expressed over the various risk elements referred to within the report and the fact that the Committee should look into these in detail over the next few months. The Director explained that there was a departmental risk report and there were safeguards in place to acknowledge and address those risks. He added that he could share this document with the Committee if they so wished;
- With regard to the review to be undertaken of all school admission dates and age ranges, officers were asked if they are happy that the capacity is in place to undertake this review. The Head of Access to Education explained that he is currently preparing a proposal report for consideration by the Departmental Management Team to look at a number of options. Consultation on any proposed revisions to the Admissions Policy will be undertaken next year.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Education & Children Departmental Business Plan 2021/22 be received.**

## **6. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT**

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

- ALN Transformation Action Plan

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.**

## **7. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period May to December 2021, which had been prepared in accordance with the Council's Constitution which required Scrutiny Committees to develop and publish annual FWPs identifying issues and reports to be considered at meetings during the course of the municipal year.

The Committee decided at a FWP development session to set the FWP initially for the period May to December 2021 and the period January to April 2022 will be discussed at a later date. This did not preclude items identified during the year for consideration at these meetings being included and the FWP updated accordingly.

Reference was made to the fact that the Committee had requested that workshops be held on the Modernising Education Programme and Self Evaluation and that these be held prior to September 2021 if possible.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period May to December 2021 be endorsed.**

## **8. TASK & FINISH**

The Education & Children Scrutiny Committee has agreed to establish a Task & Finish Group to review the current consultation process for school organisation changes including changes in linguistic provision and closure of schools.

The Committee's discussions on the key aims and objectives for this Task & Finish review have been captured and developed into a draft Planning and Scoping document.

The Task & Finish Group will consist of six elected members and a co-opted member and be politically balanced as far as possible. The Task & Finish Group will arrange to hold its first meeting as soon as possible and will appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair from its membership at this meeting. Officers from the Education & Children's Services Department and the Democratic Services Unit within the Chief Executive's Department will support the work of the Task & Finish Group.

Reference was made to the fact that towards the end of the scoping document, in the box relating to what information/documents are required to inform the work of the study, the reference to "agenda item 6" needs to be removed.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED**

**8.1 that the Task and Finish Scoping Document be received;**

**8.2 that the aims and scope of the work of the Task and Finish Group be endorsed;**

**8.3 that the membership of the Task and Finish Group be as follows:-**

- **Councillor Kim Broom**
- **Councillor Shahana Najmi**
- **Councillor Darren Price**
- **Councillor Emlyn Schiavone**
- **Councillor Bill Thomas**
- **Councillor Edward Thomas**
- **Mr Anthony Enoch**

**9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 17TH MARCH, 2021**

Reference was made to pages 3 and 4 of the minutes regarding the national consultation on language categorisation. It was pointed out that the Committee agreed that the response to the consultation should state that there should be more flexibility for secondary schools. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing confirmed that this formed part of the consultation response.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 be signed as a correct record.**

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**CHAIR**

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**DATE**