

**EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2023**

**PRESENT:** Councillor A.C. Jones (Chair)

**Councillors (In Person):**

S.M. Allen	K.V. Broom	P. Hughes-Griffiths
H. Jones	M.J.A. Lewis	S.L. Rees
E. Skinner		

**Councillors (Virtually):**

L.R. Bowen	B.W. Jones	D. Jones
M. Thomas		

**Co-opted Members (In Person):**

V. Kenny, Roman Catholic Church Representative

**Co-opted Members (Virtually):**

A. Enoch, Parent Governor

**Cabinet Members (In Person)**

G. Davies, Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language

**Also Present (In Person):**

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services  
S. Davies, Head of Access to Education  
A. Rees, Head of Strategy and Learner Support  
A Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion  
E. Forsyth, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness  
A. Carter, Senior Manager - TIC Schools  
S. Nolan, Group Accountant  
E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer  
K. Evans, Democratic Services Officer

**Also Present (Virtually):**

S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator  
L. West, Estyn Representative

**Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 am - 12.11 pm**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

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

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
B. W. Jones	Item 5: Primary School Admissions Review (Rising 4s)	Local Authority Governor in Ysgol Meithrin Rhydaman
B. W. Jones	Item 6: School Budgets	Son is Headteacher of a school within Carmarthenshire. Cllr Jones has been granted dispensation by the Standards Committee allowing her to speak and make representations only.
S. L. Rees	Item 4 - Estyn Inspection of Carmarthenshire's Local Government Education Services	Local Authority Governor in respect of Ysgol Penrhos
H. Jones*	Item 5: Primary School Admissions Review (Rising 4s)	Son is attending one of the schools where Rising 4s is in existence.

\*Declaration made at the commencement of item 5.

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

## 3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

## 4. ESTYN INSPECTION OF CARMARTHENSHIRE'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES

[Note: Councillor S. L. Rees had earlier declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting during the deliberation and voting thereof].

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. The inspection 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 identified productive working relationships with schools and other providers, with valuable and purposeful school improvement processes in place.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

On the whole, arrangements for modernising and re-organising the Authority's schools were considered to be robust, with suitable provision in place to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Reference was also made to the recent work undertaken by education services to refine its provision to support and improve behaviour within schools, and it was pleasing to note that positive outcomes had already emerged in this regard.

The report identified that over time, the inspection outcomes of schools in Carmarthenshire varied, although more recently, since the recommencement of Estyn Inspections in 2022, the proportion requiring follow-up activity by Estyn had decreased.

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.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language expressed his appreciation for the sterling efforts of all those involved to ensure the continued provision of the best possible education for children and young people.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

The Committee welcomed the positive judgements set out within the report and commended the education services department, schools and pupils alike for the exceptional report, and which provided a clear focus for the Authority in moving forward with the provision of educational services for Carmarthenshire.

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, including Committee members, parents, governors, teachers, pupils and input from Welsh Government to review the available data and identify best practice to inform the education service's strategy in going forward. Reference was made to research undertaken by 'ParentKind' on behalf of the Welsh Government which reflected upon the changing attitudes towards school attendance since the Covid-19 pandemic. In this regard a discussion ensued on the ongoing campaign to address the issue of term-time school absence for family holidays and the need for Welsh Government to explore different models of education e.g. a four-term academic year which could positively impact on attendance levels.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

In response to a query, the Director of Education and Children's Services clarified that schools recorded an array of data, including incidents of bullying, however this information would now be collated by the education services division to identify key trends.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:**

- 4.1 the report be noted;**
- 4.2 the Chair liaise with the Director of Education and Children's Services to determine an appropriate methodology for the Committee to support Education Services in improving pupil attendance levels.**

**5. PRIMARY SCHOOL ADMISSIONS REVIEW (RISING 4S)**

[Note: Councillors B. W. Jones and H. Jones declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting during the deliberation and voting thereof].

The Committee 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.

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. In an update to the Committee regarding timescales, the Director of Education and Children's Services reported that the implementation date of any changes to the full-time admission arrangements of learners would be September 2025, with consultation commencing in the near future.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

It was expressed that the termly intake of pupils presented challenges for education services in terms of administration processes and could also place significant accommodation pressures for schools in terms of the organisation of classrooms. In this regard, it was suggested that a set start date of September

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

could be an appropriate way forward, depending on the outcome of the mapping exercise that was currently underway, as well as other factors associated with the development of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

The Committee acknowledged that the disparity generated from the mixed economy early years/nursery arrangement was perceived as unfair by Governing Bodies and communities, particularly due to the adverse impact on rural areas. Accordingly, it was expressed that a consistent approach would ensure equity of provision. An assurance was provided to the Committee that the mapping exercise to identify the existing provision and future requirements for each area was near completion.

The important contribution of the early years education provision was emphasised to the Committee. In this regard the complexities of the various factors and implications surrounding the review was acknowledged by the Committee. In response to a comment that a consistent approach should be applied whereby all 3 year old children within the county should be eligible for part time education within their locality, the Director of Education and Children's Services confirmed that the provision is currently offered by way of a mixed economy early years/nursery arrangement and that making all schools 3-11 could not be guaranteed. However, the results of the gap analysis would determine the best provision for each area of the County.

It was suggested that training providers be approached as part of the ongoing mapping exercise of schools to gain further insight into the current staffing availability, as well as future projections in different areas. The Director of Education and Children's Services provided an assurance that discussions had commenced with Mudiad Meithrin in respect of staffing and recruitment requirements in an endeavour to ensure the availability of a sufficient staffing provision with the necessary skills to undertake the role.

In considering the importance of Admission Numbers (AN) and its impact on admission arrangements it was clarified that the AN for each school was calculated using the capacity formula introduced by the Welsh Government in 2011. The Head of Access to Education confirmed that the capacity calculation was being reviewed by the Welsh Government in accordance with area guidelines for new buildings.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that the cost associated with the Authority's Rising 4s Policy would be incorporated into the consultation process.

The Committee welcomed the review and requested the swift commencement of the consultation process in order to gain the views of key stakeholders.

#### **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:**

- 5.1 the report be noted;**
- 5.2 the comments and observations made by the Committee above in respect of the Primary School Admissions Review (Rising 4s)**

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

**be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration.**

## **6. SCHOOL BUDGETS**

[Note: Councillor B. W. Jones had earlier declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting during the deliberation of the matter but did not vote].

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 provided 2020/21 and 2021/22.

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

The Committee recognised that significant additional grant funding had been made available to schools by the Welsh Government during the coronavirus pandemic, which had resulted in a positive impact upon several school budgets for the 2021/22 financial year.

The Head of Access to Education, in response to a query, confirmed that no instances of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) had been identified within schools to date and school surveys were ongoing in this regard.

It was queried whether the Authority's capital programme was achievable to deliver the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme in the light of the decision made by Welsh Government to withdraw the mutual investment model for the Band B for Local Authorities. The Head of Access to Education clarified that a 3, 6 and 9 year rolling funding programme would be introduced by Welsh Government in April 2024 which would require a revised capital programme based upon current priorities and the ability of the Authority to match fund capital at a 65% intervention rate for mainstream and 75% intervention rate for ALN provision and Special schools.

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. It was reported that the issue of school deficits was further compounded by building maintenance costs, whereby the existing budget provision was insufficient to meet the cost of repairs. Accordingly, the Director of Education and Children's Services clarified that 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 Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

A synopsis of the ongoing support mechanisms offered to schools was 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.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

In response to a query, the Head of Education and Inclusion Services provided an assurance to the Committee that as a result of the support mechanisms provided by the Authority, schools now had an enhanced awareness of budget planning and expenditure requirements. However, special intervention measures were available to the Authority, if required, by way of a formal warning issued by the Section 151 Officer and Director of Education and Children's Services.

The Head of Education and Inclusion Services clarified to the Committee that the funding per head from Welsh Government was consistent for all pupils, however additional monies were distributed to schools from the Authority which varied between £3k - £8k per pupil.

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

## **7. STRATEGIC FOCUS GROUPS**

The Committee considered a report 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.

Progress updates would be provided whereby the Committee would focus on one priority in each quarter of the year, reviewing the objectives and proposing updates/changes as required.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:**

**7.1 That the report be noted;**

**7.2 That progress reports in respect of the Estyn Inspection recommendations be provided to the Committee in the first instance followed by an update in respect of the Sustainable Communities Strategic Focus Group.**

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

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

- An update on Estyn's review of the Welsh for Adults Provision.
- 10 Year Social Services strategy.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submission be noted.**

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

**9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS**

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023. In a correction to the report, the Director of Education and Children’s Services confirmed that the item pertaining to the music service provision for schools would provide an update on the delivery of the provision, though it was clarified that the service remained in-house.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 1st December 2023 be noted.**

**10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23RD JUNE 2023**

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 June 2023 be signed as a correct record.**

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**CHAIR**

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**DATE**

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.