

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22.03.12

Present: - **Councillor Dewi Owen (Chair)**
Councillor Gwen Griffith (Vice-chair)

Councillors Anwen J. Davies, Tom Ellis, Selwyn Griffiths, Louise Hughes, W. Penri Jones, Dyfrig L. Siencyn, Ioan C. Thomas and Gwilym O. Williams

Others invited: Cllr Peter Read (for Item 6)

Co-opted Members without a vote: Dilwyn Ellis Hughes (Teaching Union), Carwyn Humphreys (Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership), Rhys Wyn Parri (Gwynedd Children and Young People Network), Bethan Morris-Jones (Representative for Primary School Head Teachers).

Portfolio Leaders: R. H. Wyn Williams (Portfolio Leader – Social Services)

Also present:- Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Gwen Carrington (Head of Social Services Department), Marian Parry Hughes (Senior Children’s Services Manager), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Education Quality Improvement Officer – Inclusion / Acting Head Teacher of Ysgol Coed Menai), Gareth James (Scrutiny and Operational Manager) and Glynda O’Brien (Committee Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Alun Wyn Evans, Brian Jones, John Pughe Roberts, Liz Saville Roberts, Paul Thomas, and John Gwilym Jones (ex-officio), Dewi Lake (Representative of Secondary School Head Teachers), Carys Gwyn (Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin), Ms Rhian Roberts (Representative of Parents/Governors – Dwyfor), Reverend Robert Townsend (Church in Wales) and Dewi Jones (Head of Education Department).

1. **CHAIR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

A welcome was extended to Mr Nigel Griffiths, Wales Audit Office, who was present to observe the scrutiny methods of this Committee as this would be the final meeting under the current procedure before the proposed change in the Council’s governance procedure following the Election in May.

2. **DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

Mr Rhys Wyn Parri declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Additional Learning Needs Review as he was employed by SNAP Cymru which received a grant for working in this field. He was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and he withdrew from the Chamber during the discussion on the item.

3. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee held on 2 February 2012 as a true record.

4. CORPORATE PARENT PANEL'S ANNUAL REPORT

A presentation was received from Mr Iwan Trefor Jones, Corporate Director, in the absence of the Lead Member – Children and Young People, on the activities of the Corporate Parent Panel. He emphasised that the work of the above-mentioned Panel was in the corporate ownership of the Council with the responsibility to ensure that each looked after child was given fair and due protection. It was noted that 193 children and young people were being looked after in Gwynedd with an increase of 10% from last year. This was above the national average. The number included a high percentage of babies, teenagers as well as children and young people with disabilities.

The Panel met once every two months and it was chaired by the Lead Member – Children and Young People. Some of the themes that had been the topic of discussion by the Corporate Parent Panel were highlighted, such as:

- **The Education of Looked After Children** – education plans to ensure that each looked after child achieved educationally to his/her full potential. It was noted in the educational results of Key Stage 4 in the summer 2011 that the number of pupils who had gained grades A-C had increased and that 90% of children and young people had either proceeded to further education or specific employment. However, the Panel had identified that there was further work to be done; but the performance was relatively good on the whole.
- **Service for Disabled Children** – there was a need to increase the respite provision for families and Members were reminded of the development in the pipeline to provide a new Ysgol Hafod Lon; the process of recruiting foster parents and an increase in the demand for educational residential placements. The need for an increase in the support from clinical / psychiatric nurses was noted and concern regarding this had been forwarded to the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board and CAMHS Service.
- **Training and Employment for Looked After Young People** – in this context, it was noted that supporting young people to follow courses and work experience was challenging but that there was close collaboration with Careers Wales to this end. Work was in progress to develop opportunities for young people by means of an apprenticeship scheme and it was aimed to get approximately 20 – 30 looked after young people to take advantage of an apprenticeship as a means of access to work.
- **The Voice of Looked After Young People** – the importance of listening to the voice of young people and to ensure a response to any concerns they had was noted. The Lead Member – Children and Young People had played a key role in "Have Your Say" sessions. Meetings would be held with representation of young people who had left care to discover how they continued to be supported.
- **Advocacy Service** – it was noted that a new agreement was in place which was a monitoring arrangement to ensure that NIACE supported children and young people.

- **The Reports of the Independent Review Officer** – regular reports were received from the Independent Review Officer to ensure that plans were in place and that regular reviews were undertaken in order to have an overview of the situation. The Panel noted concern regarding the reduction in the support of the Looked After Children Nurse in terms of holding independent reviews.

The Senior Manager – Children Service added that following discussions with the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board that it was now understood that the full-time Nurse had retired and that a part-time Nurse had been employed who did not reach all children and who had to prioritise visits. At present, the Health Board had not committed to increase the capacity.

- **The Performance of the Service** – it was noted that statutory visits had been held in accordance with the regulations; that looked after children had received three or more placements; and that looked after children had visited a dentist during the year.

To close, the Corporate Director noted that he was of the view that there was room for improvement and to continue to place focus on those matters that required attention. The Corporate Parent Panel would continue with its work following the Election in May and under the Council's new governance procedure, it would be reporting directly to the Cabinet.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were highlighted by individual Members:

- (a) that the fact that the Looked After Children Nurse did not reach all looked after children and had to prioritise visits was a matter of concern for many Members and it was suggested that the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board should be contacted to express discontent to this end and place pressure on them to resolve the matter in light of the fact that it was a statutory service and that the way forward should be investigated without delay.
- (b) discontent that the information submitted before the committee was not an annual report; therefore, it was not possible for Members to scrutinise it effectively. No information had been submitted regarding how many looked after children did not receive a visit and that it was not fair to ask the Committee to scrutinise it due to the lack of evidence. In light of the fact that all Council Members had a responsibility for these children as corporate parents, follow-up to the concern highlighted in (a) above should be ensured by means of:
 - obtaining clarity regarding how the Corporate Parent Panel's work would be scrutinised under the new governance procedure
 - giving a presentation to the new Council on the duties and remit of the Corporate Parent Panel
 - every Member receiving training regarding his/her responsibility as a Corporate Parent
 - submitting an annual report to the relevant Scrutiny Committee under the new governance procedure

In response, the Head of Social Services Department agreed with the Members' concerns and noted that the service continued to work hard regarding the provision in collaboration with the

Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board; but noted that they were also making a big effort in a period of financial cuts.

Resolved: (a) To ask the Head of Social Services Department to contact Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board to express discontent regarding its unwillingness regarding its shortcomings in delivering a statutory service and concern regarding the failure to appoint a full-time Looked After Children Nurse and that they should resolve the matter and investigate the way forward without delay.

(b) To ask the Corporate Director (ITJ) to ensure under the Council's new governance arrangements, that Members:

- (i) receive clarity regarding how the work of the Corporate Parent Panel is scrutinised by submitting an annual report to the relevant Scrutiny Committee as the Strategic and Improvement Department is leading on the Annual Report;
- (ii) have a presentation on the duties and remit of the Corporate Parent Panel;
- (iii) receive training regarding their responsibility as a corporate parent.

5. CARE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP REPORT

Submitted: The report of the Care Scrutiny Working Group outlining the relevant matters in the work of the Care Programme Board.

Councillor Peter Read, the Chairman of the Working Group, provided the background to the report and noted that the Working Group had worked exceptionally well and that he was grateful to all for their commitment.

Members were given an opportunity to scrutinise the contents of the report and individual Members highlighted the following points:

- (a) whilst it was obvious that thorough work had been achieved by the Working Group, it appeared that more positive answers were needed, such as the failure to complete the Children Commissioning Plan as this work had slipped since 2008. Many members reiterated their disappointment and discontent that this Plan had not been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, considering that it was a priority within the Council's Three Year Plan. Members felt that it was their duty to receive a positive response and that they would not be effective scrutinisers should they be unable to scrutinise the Plan. The need to press for the commitment of Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board to collaborate was noted further.
- (b) disappointment that the programme of collaborating with the Anglesey Children and Young People Partnership had slipped and it was not obvious in the report why the programme had slipped and the intended response. A Member reminded the Committee that she had been concerned regarding collaborating with Anglesey as it could weaken Gwynedd's performance.
- (c) concern regarding what was noted in point 1.3 of the report, namely that the Working Group was acting as an experiment of the Council's Programme Boards' scrutiny arrangements. It was felt that this Working Group was one of the best amongst the other Working Groups of the Council in terms of scrutiny and it was proposed to recommend

to the Council in its new form that the Care Scrutiny Working Group be re-established with representation from the three Scrutiny Committees serving on it.

In response to the above, the Head of Social Services Department explained that lack of capacity was partly responsible for the failure in completing the Children Commissioning Plan and that no acceptable version was available to submit to the Scrutiny Committee. Assurance was given that representation from the service would attend the next meeting of the Working Group to explain the frustration and reasons for the failure to complete it. Whilst accepting that it had been programmed in the Three Year Plan; priority had been given to the adults and disability plans and it was fully accepted that the intention was for it to be submitted within the specified timetable.

In terms of collaborating with Anglesey, it was noted that Anglesey Social Services had experienced a challenging period recently in terms of the work programme and consequently, it had affected the availability of officers. Assurance was given that the slippage had not affected the quality of the day to day performance of the service for the children of Gwynedd. The frustration affected the development of plans to obtain a better foundation and efficiency in fields such as developing the specialist workforce. It was noted that there were opportunities to collaborate with Anglesey as they were close neighbours for Gwynedd, in particular in those fields where it would be possible to collaborate for the benefit of the services and assurance was given that very mature discussions were being held between officers.

The Corporate Director added that the intention here was to follow the guidance of the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to establish three Local Service Boards for the north in order to coordinate priorities and identify the policy direction for specific areas. Therefore, as a result, there was a need to accept that Gwynedd and Anglesey operated as one Local Service Board and that the partnership work reported to this Board. However, the importance of continuing to collaborate with other areas and bearing this in mind when reaching out as a County was noted.

Resolved: (a) To approve the recommendations of the Care Scrutiny Working Group as noted below:

- (i) that the Working Group considers the report of the Head of Housing and Social Services Department on the Children Commissioning Plan at its meeting on 23 March and draws up recommendations for the attention of the Principal Scrutiny Committee on 29 March;**
- (ii) in the case of both Supporting Families – Intense Intervention and Breaking the Cycle – Supporting Families projects, that the Corporate Director (ITJ):**
 - draws up a plan on the best way to manage the risk when transferring the service between both projects**
 - undertakes a clear assessment of the resources required and how they will be made available**
 - holds discussions with the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board and other partners to seek their commitment to the work and to make financial contributions towards the plan**
- (iii) that the Service forms a quality measurement for private fostering as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework;**

(iv) **that the Corporate Director (ITJ) ensures that administrative collaboration takes place through the medium of Welsh in terms of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Children and Young People Partnerships.**

(b) To recommend to the Council under the new governance procedure that the Care Scrutiny Working Group is re-established with relevant representation from the three Scrutiny Committees serving on it.

6. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS REVIEW

Submitted: The report of the Head of Education Department outlining the strategic review in the field of additional learning needs.

Members were guided through the content of the report by Mr Gwern ap Rhisiart (Education Quality Improvement Officer – Inclusion) and noted that the continuing focus of the review would tie-in with the national features as noted below:

- **Results for learners** – that will ensure compliance with the core aims of the United Nations and Welsh Government.

There would be a need to ensure better achievement and well-being and better participation with the focal point of the process being planning with the child or young person.

- **Results for Parents** – through ensuring a stronger partnership and greater trust, pupils' needs will be more fully met.

It was noted that a number of key people including teachers, assistants, central officers from the schools service, CYNNAL and representatives from the additional learning needs joint-committee had already contributed to the review; however, the most important contribution was the observations of the families. The intention of the review would be to consider a more effective provision that in turn would create savings of £400,000 on the current provision and service. The hope would be to provide a better quality of provision and thus ensure that the children received assistance.

The devolution of additional learning needs funding, the Cognition and Learning Team, specific language impairment centres, along with the proposed changes to the special educational needs procedure, were expanded upon.

The Corporate Director reiterated that the Strategic Review was important work and that it caused concern in terms of the need to make substantial expenditure to ensure that purposeful arrangements were in place to support pupils. It was noted that there was a significant challenge in terms of managing any change deriving from the review. Parents tended to be of the view that obtaining a statement was the answer for their children; however, it was sought to ensure that the review offered alternative answers and choices for the pupils. He added that early intervention was important in order to ensure that children, by means of the education system, were given attention at the beginning of their education. The first step of the review, which would set the direction for the future, would be submitted to the Cabinet following the establishment of the new Council in May. It was noted that an incredible workforce was working

in this field and that there was a need to ensure best value from the workforce, even if this involved a different way of supporting the children.

Members were given an opportunity to scrutinise the report and they highlighted the following points:

(a) It was nice to note the success of the Cognition and Learning Team following the restructuring as there had been an increase in the numbers of pupils receiving attention. Similarly, pride was taken in the fact that the procedures in the language impairment centres were more inclusive for pupils under the current process where they attended for two full days, rather than five mornings a week.

(b) the need to make a decision soon regarding the location of the new Ysgol Hafod Lon was noted. In addition, it was pleaded whether or not it would be possible to make a final decision regarding the inclusion units in the secondary schools so that the schools could proceed to establish them.

The above-mentioned comment regarding the inclusion units as a result of closing Ysgol Coed Menai, Bangor, and to ensure sufficient resources for the schools to maintain pupils with behavioural needs was reiterated. The importance of ensuring that no decline would be seen in the quality of pupil education as a result of this was noted.

In response to the point regarding establishing inclusion units, the Education Quality Improvement Officer – Inclusion confirmed that the matter would be discussed at a meeting of the Secondary Strategic Group on 29 March.

The Corporate Director gave assurance that resources were in place by means of the Three Year Plan jointly with the funding from the Education Service in order to establish the inclusion process as a result of closing Ysgol Coed Menai and relocating the pupils.

(c) the comments regarding the increase in the number of pupils receiving attention, bearing in mind all of the concerns highlighted regarding this at previous meetings, were reiterated.

(ch) the importance of ensuring provision for vulnerable groups was noted.

(d) the wish for Members to receive Educare training in the field of child protection to enable them to receive an accreditation through the NSPCC was proposed and seconded.

(dd) it was asked whether or not Teams Around the Family advised parents so that they were more proactive with their children.

In response, the Corporate Director noted that very good developmental work was happening in respect of the Teams Around the Family. Recent research had been undertaken where approximately 2,200 vulnerable families had been identified in Gwynedd and that there were over 3,000 children in those families. 20% of the 3,000 had severe needs. The challenge was to arrange a provision that would be able to offer an integrated service for these families, so that all agencies collaborated together to support them. This key plan was important and one that could support vulnerable families.

(e) it was asked whether or not it was possible that many of the looked after children fell into the category of pupils who were entitled to free school meals and that schools were being banded based on the results of these pupils. It was understood that schools received grants to maintain them; however, it was possible that the money only paid for one assistant. It was felt that the government did not do enough to support and maintain them.

In response, the Education Quality Improvement Officer – Inclusion explained that grant funding was received for traveller children and that it was used to support children, e.g. if travellers refused to allow their children to go to school, the grant would be used to ensure another provision and it was sought to be as flexible as possible in terms of its use. It was noted that the Council also contributed and had to report back to the Welsh Government regarding the use made of the grant. It was emphasised that the number of traveller families was relatively low in Gwynedd.

(f) a Member noted that although a strategic review was held that it appeared that operational things took place also.

The Education Quality Improvement Officer- Inclusion reported that the strategic review was considering how to make better use of the field in its entirety. A review of the Cognition and Learning Team field had taken place prior to the strategic review and that it would not be considered as part of the review; however, it would be revisited and consideration would be given to evidence of good practice, etc.

The aim was for the results of the review to be operational from September 2013 with the final report being submitted to the Council in the spring 2013.

It was acknowledged that the entire process was complicated; however, it was hoped that the strategic review would lead to it being simplified and obtaining much better clarity in terms of the role of a school, the authority and the Special Educational Needs Joint-committee and a number of other forums.

(ff) in response to an enquiry regarding the feedback of teachers and schools to the restructuring and the establishment of the Cognition and Learning Team, the Education Quality Assurance Officer – Inclusion explained that a report had been previously submitted to the Scrutiny Committee noting the views of schools and parents. Whilst accepting that there had been a substantial change in the type of work undertaken by teachers, the evidence noted that children made better progress as a result of the change.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the contents of the report.

(b) To ask the Education Department to arrange that all Members of the new Council receive Educare training in the field of child protection with the intention of receiving a certificate through the NSPCC.

7. FINAL REPORT OF THE EDUCATION REORGANISATION IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP

Submitted: The final report of the Education Reorganisation Improvement Working Group.

(a) The Corporate Director reported that focus had been placed on the education reorganisation strategy through the Improvement Working Group to ensure that the process addressed the areas where the need for change was at its most obvious and clear. The reorganisation had commenced in the areas of Y Berwyn, Dysynni and Y Gader in Meirionnydd with the Working Group having achieved the work programme set for reorganising education in terms of looking at the three above-mentioned catchment areas and submitting proposals. It was noted that those proposals had now reached the point of issuing statutory notices or statutory consultation. An important part of the work was to target resources from the Assembly Government by means of the Twenty-first Century Schools Programme. Very frustrating times has been experienced on occasions in light of the fact that the government had changed the guidelines, delays in responding to financial applications and the criteria being amended when submitting applications. However, confirmation had been received that the Council's application for the sum of £18m had been successful and this was in addition to the money that had been secured for building the new school in the Bro Dysynni area and the new Ysgol yr Hendre. The investment for new schools was to be welcomed; however, there was still some way to go before moving this agenda forward. It was noted that it was important for the new Cabinet to address and give priority to secondary education in Meirionnydd as a result of the reduction in pupil numbers at the five schools. Research had been undertaken to gather evidence; however, it would be required to press on to consider options and propose a plan to provide a firm foundation for secondary education in Meirionnydd.

(b) A Member from Meirionnydd noted that the report did not fully reflect the views of members regarding their concerns about the lack of progress in the discussion about the secondary schools in the Meirionnydd area. Although the Head Teachers Panel noted the desire for change, the Member was not of the view that the evidence submitted conveyed how vulnerable the situation was. Many messages had been conveyed from this Scrutiny Committee that Members needed to be central in the discussion because of the lack of desire to press on. The Member was confident that the new Council, with representation of Meirionnydd Members, would develop firm and various models that could be considered.

(c) A Member noted that he was of the opinion that the pupil numbers of Meirionnydd and Dwyfor Secondary Schools had reduced because they had lost the sixth form from schools with the pupils now attending a further education college. Another factor relating to the reduction in numbers was the fact that Meirionnydd was a rural area with lack of employment in the area.

(ch) In response, many Members disagreed with the above-mentioned comment; however, the Corporate Director (ITJ), noted that it was anticipated that 1,200 pupils would be attending the Meirionnydd secondary schools across the five sites in future and that the average pupil numbers in secondary schools in Wales was 1,300. Considering the reduction in numbers, this meant teaching small groups of pupils, with teachers having to teach many subjects and this could reflect badly on the results of some subjects.

(d) Another member noted that even Head Teachers in Arfon and Anglesey collaborated together because of the problems of providing various courses for 16-19 year old education.

An amendment to recommendation 4.2 of the report as noted in (ii) below was proposed and seconded. A vote was taken on the amendment.

Resolved: (a) To ask the Corporate Director (ITJ) to ensure that:

- (i) the new Council speeds up the process of reorganising education, in particular secondary education in Meirionnydd.**
- (ii) Members draw up a Detailed Action Plan without delay for the consideration of the key partners noted in 3.6 of the report in order to ensure that they understand their role in the process and are able to make a constructive and timely contribution.**

8. THANKS

The Corporate Director took advantage of the opportunity to give thanks on behalf of the officers to the Chair and Vice-chair for their praiseworthy work in the chair over the past two years. Similarly, he thanked Members for their contributions in scrutinising and challenging the content of reports, in particular considering that this Scrutiny Committee had been given a relatively heavy and challenging work programme at times.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.15 pm.

CHAIR