
SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31.07.12

Present:

Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn – Chair
Councillor Peter Read - Vice-chair

Councillors: Huw Edwards, Alan Jones-Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Chris Hughes, Elin Walker Jones, Linda Ann Wyn Jones, Llywarch Bowen Jones, Siôn Wyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, Liz Saville Roberts, Ann Williams, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Wyn Williams, R. Hefin Williams and Tom Ellis.

**Co-opted Members
with a vote on education**

issues only: Dylan Davies (Meirionnydd Parent Governors Representative)
Rhian Roberts (Dwyfor Parent Governors Representative)
The Reverend Robert Townsend (Church in Wales)

Officers: Gareth James (Members' Manager Support and Scrutiny) and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

In attendance for the scrutiny items:-

Item 7 – Review of the Youth Service

Cabinet Member – Councillor Paul Thomas (Gwynedd Iach)
Support Officers – Catrin Thomas (Senior Manager People and Communities)
Nia Morris (Youth Service Manager)

Items 8 and 9 – Education Strategy and Scrutiny Investigation into Quality of Education

Cabinet Member - Councillor Siân Gwenllian (Education)
Support Officer - Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director)

Apologies: Councillor Selwyn Griffiths (ex-officio member)

1. WELCOME

Councillor Huw Edwards was welcomed to the meeting following his recent illness.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The following members declared a personal interest, if matters concerning their interest should be discussed:

- (i) Councillor Linda Ann Wyn Jones as she worked in the field of learning disabilities.
- (ii) Ms Rhian Roberts as she worked for Careers Wales.

3. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on 7 June 2012 as a true record, subject to the following amendment:

Item 5 (iii) – Co-opted Members

To note that there were 3 parent-governor representatives (each representing the areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd) rather than 2 as noted.

4. CORPORATE PARENT PANEL

Resolved: To elect Councillor Elin Walker Jones to represent the Services Scrutiny Committee on the Corporate Parent Panel.

5. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted: The latest version of this Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

Reported: (i) By the Chair, that it was proposed to invite a representative of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to discuss with all Council Members on the morning of 13 September 2012, the consultation during August/September and October regarding the changes to health care and the recommendations to be submitted on the afternoon of the 13th as part of the Services Scrutiny Committee agenda.

(ii) That it was necessary to review the remit of this Scrutiny Committee in a year's time as there was a view that the combination of education and care was a huge workload.

Resolved: (a) **To include the annual work programme as a permanent item on the committee's Agenda in order to adapt the agenda as it saw fit.**

(b) **To add the following fields to the agenda:**

- **The Position of Welsh Medium Education in Gwynedd schools and to air a definition of bilingualism**
- **The far reaching implications for the Council stemming from the new Mental Health Measure announced by the Welsh Government**

(c) **Delete:**

- **The word 'sufferers' in point 8 and replace with 'persons with autism'.**
- **No. 14 – Telecare and Equipment to Support People, from the agenda.**

6. REVIEW OF THE YOUTH SERVICE

Cabinet Member: Cllr. Paul Thomas

The report of the Cabinet Member (Gwynedd Iach) outlining the progress of the Youth Service.

Members were given an opportunity to question the Cabinet Member and support officers and the following responses were received to their enquiries.

- (a) that 7,708 had registered with the Youth Service for the year 2011/12 which was an increase of 290 compared with last year's figures. The reason for this was that the Service operated a more effective recording system and offered opportunities that young people desired. Members were glad that there was an increase in the number who received a service and that there was an improvement in the recording procedure.
- (b) There were 5 non-Welsh speaking members of staff who had worked for the Service for over 20 years and based in south Meirionnydd. It was noted that 3 were following a language learning course at Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor and the other 2 had stated that they had no interest in learning.
- (c) That no progress had been achieved in terms of offering buildings such as a youth coffee bar mainly due to the lack of resources and funding, however, assurance was given that there was an improvement in provision and what was available within the buildings currently used. That the Service had not managed to find better buildings for young people in certain places. However, there had been an investment in improved provision such as a coffee bar and resources and a better provision in the buildings available to them.
- (ch) That there was a historical under spend in the Youth Service and the tendency was for the Assembly's Youth Service Department to release grants around mid March with the requirement to spend the money by the end of that month. This grant was in the sum of £30,000 and therefore responded to the under spend.
- (d) That it was not possible to implement the pilot scheme to open youth clubs on weekends. It was noted that resources would be referred to the hours outside usual club hours by extending the main centres up to an additional 12 weeks to the usual term and often the youth bus was used on weekends in order to reach out to dispersed communities. It was stressed that the Youth Service strategy was to provide a curriculum of learning for young people between 11 and 25 years old in an environment of activities and not to try and get children off the streets.
- (dd) That the Youth Services budget was approximately £1.2m per annum and European funds were targeted as well as external bodies. The budget was reduced annually and next year the Assistance Fund would be replaced by the Families First Fund which meant less money, especially for the third sector for youth activities.
- (e) There were 5 School Youth Workers supporting young people in the age group 14-16 years old and they worked with the most vulnerable groups who were likely to leave education with no qualification. By joint working with Youth Workers these groups were offered an opportunity to attain BTEC accreditations which were not part of the traditional curriculum such as building skills, gardening, computers etc. It was noted that the Youth Service could not offer financial support or a bursary towards further education.
- (f) Assurance was given that the proposed plans were ready to respond to any unexpected grants available.
- (ff) Staff were appointed to lead youth clubs on the basis of interview and full training was given during their first year. In the last few years young enthusiastic staff had been appointed and success had been seen in these clubs. However, there was a good deal of work to be achieved to ensure the success of each of the clubs. In addition, every club was evaluated annually to ensure quality and it was noted that 100% of the staff had qualified to NVQ Level 3 i.e. the highest possible qualification for youth club leaders.
- (g) Target areas were identified via policy namely the deprivation index as well as via links with Head teachers, the Police, Social Workers in order to identify if a problem arises in communities at short notice. At that time a youth bus will be ensured for a period of 6 weeks to assess the need, be that to open a club or continue with the bus service. The bus can accommodate 20 persons.
- (h) The Youth Service collaborated well with the Young Farmers' Clubs and it was

confirmed that the service trained the organisation's officers. A grant of £5,000 was given to the Meirionnydd Young Farmers last year to develop Level 1 BTEC skills in business and enterprise. They were proud that 63 members had attained the accreditation and the organisation was in the lead when compared with other Young Farmers' organisation in Wales.

- (i) That the Youth Service had no control over the Sailing Academy, Pwllheli and it was Plas Heli that would manage that new facility. However, assurance was given that youth clubs used resources for outdoor activities that were available locally.
- (j) It was explained that the John Muir Award was an environmental award presented to young people who has completed any work or scheme in their community e.g. gardening /tidying up the town.

Recommendations

To request that the Cabinet Member:

- (i) **discusses further with the Local Member in relation to the comment made regarding a lack of information to parents about the sports scheme in Cricieth**
- (ii) **meets the Bangor Youth Group to discuss how more activities could be offered to the young people of Bangor**
- (iii) **investigates how the youth provision could be extended in other deprived areas of Bangor in addition to Maesgeirchen**
- (iv) **ensures more collaboration in the context of learning disabilities within youth clubs**
- (v) **sends the latest Youth Service user figures including the Urdd and Young Farmers for information to Members.**
- (vi) **provides information to Members on how the Youth Bus route is operated and organised.**

7. EDUCATION STRATEGY

Cabinet Member: Cllr Siân Gwenllian

A report by the Cabinet Member (Education) – Cllr. Siân Gwenllian was considered outlining the background to the primary education reorganisation strategy together with the outcomes of the schemes thus far. It was emphasised that it was rather premature to assess the impact of these reorganisation schemes until the new schemes were operational. However, some plans were already operational and others were still being developed in the catchment areas of Dolgellau, Tywyn and Penllyn.

In terms of the work programme to be implemented over the next period, it was noted that there was significant work to be achieved and the strategy was based on ensuring an educational provision based on quality and sustainability in the future.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for the report and attention was drawn to the following:

- (a) concern, stemming from the arrival of a new school namely Ysgol yr Hendre, that it would draw children from Ysgol Maesincla and bearing in mind the promises given that this would not occur what measures would the authority take to prevent this happening in the future.
- (b) That the report did not refer to liaison with communities and one of the shortcomings of the previous education strategy was communication and listening to the views of residents on education in their areas,

- (c) That there was a difference in the per capita funding allocated to pupils in England and Wales and there was no reference in the report to specific considerations in Gwynedd regarding higher expenditure levels such as the total population, vulnerable communities, the area's economy together with the main factor that they were Welsh speaking areas.
- (d) That a baseline should be established at the start of any re-organisation process against the closure of schools until there was robust evidence to prove to the contrary such as that education standards were unacceptable and that communities approved of their closure.
- (e) It was trusted that lessons would be learnt from the actions undertaken in the re-organisation process under the previous Council to avoid tensions within communities. It was noted that the previous process had been very painful for the Dysynni area, Tywyn which had split communities with parents declaring that they would not send their children to the proposed new school at Llanegryn.
- (f) Parents had to be convinced how good the new resources and the quality of education would be in the new schools to avoid a movement by pupils to schools in other areas which in turn would make the new schools empty.
- (g) Would consideration be given to changing the emphasis of the re-organisation process to that of a development of lifelong learning schools bearing in mind the vulnerable situation and the reduction in pupil numbers in the secondary sector in the Meirionnydd area which meant losing teachers and as a result it was difficult for schools to offer a sufficient and suitable curriculum.
- (h) The importance that the authority keeps the re-organisation process in Gwynedd under control in order that the Assembly Government's Education Minister does not intervene setting special measures to reduce the number of empty places.
- (i) It was noted that the forecast in the Penllyn area, Bala was different to other areas in the county as there was an increase in the number of pupils and it would be necessary to ensure that there was capacity within the new re-organisation strategy to deal with this.
- (j) That the unanimous view of the Federation of Primary Head teachers should be considered namely that schools needed to be re-organised due to various valid reasons noted in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (k) Whilst accepting that it was premature to come to conclusions regarding the implementation of the re-organisation plans that had already been approved by the previous strategy, it was noted that it was important to move on with the process of change bearing in mind that the voice and experiences of children, communities, educators underpinned the process together with the provision of Welsh Language education as the educative and live language within schools and it was therefore an opportunity to achieve a real change.

Recommendations to the Cabinet Member:

- (a) Provide relevant information on how the total of 900 empty places across the county was arrived at.**
- (b) Approve in principle the establishment of a Working Group to assist the Cabinet Member to implement a working programme for the re-organisation of schools in the County, subject to receiving legal advice from the Monitoring Officer.**

(Councillors Alwyn Gruffydd and Llywarch Bowen Jones abstained from voting in connection to recommendation (b) above).

- (c) Present a report regarding the establishment of a Working Group to the next Services Scrutiny Committee and nominate representatives to serve on it, if it was appropriate to establish the working group.**

8. SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Cabinet Member: Cllr Siân Gwenllian

A report was submitted by the Cabinet Member (Education) – Councillor Siân Gwenllian requesting the Committee to consider if they wished to establish a Scrutiny Investigation into the quality of education in Gwynedd.

The Cabinet Member stated that the main priority was to create full opportunities for every child in the County and to realise this it was necessary to:

- (a) ensure consistency in the quality of experiences gained by children and young people in our schools
- (b) create an educational system that will thrive in future
- (c) give particular focus to children and their families who require additional support to fully develop.

It was evident that there was a gap in school results especially in Key Stage 4 and it would be beneficial to investigate the reasons why and find evidence to identify the problems and resolve how to get to grips with the problem.

The Cabinet Member's attention was drawn to the following observations:

- (i) the need to provide a piece of research on the relevance of the free school meals indicator to identify rural deprivation
- (ii) concern that school staff had to deal with data regarding free school meals indicators and consequently this had a detrimental impact to achieve the work

Resolved: (a) Establish a Scrutiny Investigation into Quality of Education and appoint the following Members to be part of the investigation:

- (a) **Chair or Vice-chair of the Services Scrutiny Committee**
- (b) **Councillor Liz Saville Roberts**
- (c) **Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd**
- (d) **Councillor Dewi Owen**
- (e) **Councillor Siôn Wyn Jones**
- (f) **Reverend Robert Townsend**

(b) To approve the following points as matters for investigation:

- (i) **why did polarisation occur in the KS4 performance of schools?**
- (ii) **Achievement standards in Mathematics and the impact of this on the TL2+ indicator**
- (iii) **Why were the quality standards and KS3 provision generally robust across all the authority's schools?**
- (iv) **Nurture a fuller understanding of the performance of pupils receiving free school meals and the degree the achievement of the groups of learners have an impact on KS4**
- (v) **The relevance of the free school meals indicator to identify rural deprivation**
- (vi) **The impact of leadership on the performance of schools and the way leadership skills are nurtured and developed.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.30pm