
SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 27/09/16

Present:

Councillor Beth Lawton (Chair)
Councillor Eirwyn Williams (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Alan Jones Evans, Aled Evans, E. Selwyn Griffiths, Alwyn Gruffydd, Siân Wyn Hughes, Linda Ann Wyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Dewi Owen, Gareth A. Roberts, Ann Williams and R H Wyn Williams.

Co-opted Members: Rita Price (Catholic Church)

Officers: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Corporate Support Manager), Gareth James (Members' Manager - Support and Scrutiny) and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Also in attendance:

For item 3 below:

Councillor Mair Rowlands
Aled Davies, Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department
Marian Parry Hughes, Head of Children and Supporting Families Department
Helen Fon Owen, Regional Learning Disability Manager

For Item 4 below:

Councillor W. Gareth Roberts, Cabinet Member for Adults and Health

For Items 3, 5 and 6 below:

Councillor Gareth Thomas, Cabinet Member for Education
Arwyn Thomas, Head of Education Department
Keith Parry, West Gwynedd Area Education Officer

Apologies: Councillors Elin Walker Jones and Peter Read.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this Committee that took place on 26 May 2016.

3. GWYNEDD COUNCIL 2015-16 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW – THE FIELDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND CARE

Submitted:

- (a) An overview of the Council's performance so far in the field of Children and Young People and Care, which addressed the transformational plans that were in the Council's strategic plan.
 - (b) Written responses from the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Leisure and the Cabinet Member for Education to specific questions from the Members of the Services Scrutiny Committee.
 - (i) The opportunity was taken to congratulate Aled Davies on his permanent appointment to the post of the Head of Adults and Well-being Department and he was wished well for the future.
 - (ii) Stemming from the content of the report and verbal questions, responses were as follows:
 - The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People acknowledged that deterioration had been seen in the personal education percentages for looked after children but was confident that the problems had been resolved in terms of processes, with the relationship well between the Education Department and Social Services. It was foreseen that there would be an increase in the target by next year.
 - In terms of an increase in the number of permanent exclusions in primary schools, the Cabinet Member for Education explained that, following having to close a specialist unit in Felinheli due to safety issues, he was confident that the number of exclusions would decrease because alternative arrangements had been put in place in schools to support pupils with intense and emotional behaviour. It was assured that there would be an effort to decrease the number excluded. It was further noted that schools had been able to cope very well after the closure of the unit and they were to be praised for the work done with the children.
 - In response to a query regarding support for 3* pupils, the Cabinet Member for Education explained that, due to changes to the additional learning needs and inclusion provision, there was much emphasis on early intervention and, as a result, every child would receive an individual plan.
 - In response to concern highlighted in the context of a reduction in the budget for preventative services and, in particular, the Team around the Children, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that a Multi-agency Task Group was considering streams of specific work funded by the grant. The Head of Children and Supporting Families Department reiterated that the funding would continue with a slight reduction and that the direction and the vision was changing in terms of access to the provisions in accordance with needs that had been identified during the previous period. It was further noted that the preventative strategies identified gaps based on local needs in the fields as follows:
 - Speech and language delay
 - Parenting
 - Behaviour
 - Access to low level mental health services for children, young people and adults
- The Task Group agreed on the way forward, forming an action programme to commission the service for the future. It was acknowledged that there were risks in terms of a reduction to the projects in the future.
- It was noted that the Services Scrutiny Committee was supportive of the above mentioned preventative service and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young

People was asked to convey the Committee's wish to ensure that individuals received due support.

- In response to a query from a Member regarding raising parents' awareness of the arrangements for safeguarding children and young people, it was explained that the Council had raised every staff member's awareness of safeguarding children and had received training to this end. It was noted that every Department within the Council had designated a person responsible for safeguarding in order to enable them to identify problems. It was further noted that the work done within the Council was to be praised. It was suggested to elected Members who were governors to raise awareness of the above in the schools.
- There was concern that the Council did not consider and think ahead so that it could respond quickly when legislation changed etc.
- In response to the above, the Cabinet Member for Education noted that the Council very often led on projects throughout the whole of Wales when changes happened and attention was drawn to one project, which was to raise education standards, noting that Gwynedd's performance was in first position in terms of the performance of 15 year old pupils, and fifth in terms of level 2+ threshold.
- There was concern for the low level of support that would be available specifically in relation to the mental health provision. In response, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that an officer from the Health Board had been appointed to collaborate with the service and that it was possible to move on as needed.
- The Cabinet Member for Education vowed that he would arrange an open day (on a Saturday) for elected Members for the new Ysgol Hafod Lon in Penrhydeudraeth. The school would open during half term, with an open day arranged for parents. It was further noted that he would welcome more community use of the building such as the therapy room.
- The Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department confirmed that, in terms of the Care Challenge project, a Well-being Manager had been appointed on 1 July 2016 and, during the first weeks, she had been familiarising herself with the work and meeting individuals. She would be providing a work programme and it was assured that she would submit a report within 6 months on the developments for the preparatory meeting for this Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved: (a) To accept, note and thank the officer for the report.

(b) To ask the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to convey the wish of this Scrutiny Committee to assure the continuation of the support to a range of preventative services for groups of vulnerable children and Young people within the County.

(c) To request that the Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department submits a further report on the work programme of the Well-being Manager for the preparatory meeting of this Scrutiny Committee within approximately 6 months.

4. THE CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES (CSSIW) AND HEALTHCARE INSPECTORATE WALES (HIW) INSPECTION OF THE CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY LEARNING DISABILITIES SERVICES IN WALES

A report was submitted outlining the vision for learning disabilities services in Gwynedd, a review of the arrangements in order to realise the vision along with information about the main findings of the review and an action plan.

During the ensuing discussion, the following responses were given to the observations of the Members:

- In response to a request regarding the work of developing strategic contacts in collaboration between health and social services, the Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department explained that the work on a regional level was progressing and reported to the Scrutiny Services Committee as part of the process before it was submitted to the Government.
- In response to concern highlighted by Cllr Linda Ann Wyn Jones regarding the reduction in the number of social workers, the Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department promised he would try to seek information for the Member of the structure, including the number of social workers that existed four years ago. It was further noted by looking at previous structures and the existing ones that it needed to be borne in mind how the service had progressed and had to cope with changes in legislation, technology etc.
- It was noted that attending Deprivation of Liberty (DoLs) training had been an eye opener and it was noted that there was grave concern about the lack of assessors. Around 200 cases were on the waiting list and there was concern that this could cost around £1,000 a week for the Council.
- In response to the above, the Head of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department explained that the Council had taken steps to give one-off funding to deal with the cases on the waiting list, but in all likelihood an application would have to be submitted for continuous funding to deal with the waiting list. It was confirmed that a co-ordinator had been appointed along with arrangements put in place to train social workers to be competent to deal with the cases. Currently, it was believed that at least 13 officers were trained to Carry out assessments and it was aimed to try to train 20 over a period of time. The matter was receiving further attention and a discussion was being held with the relevant Cabinet Member in terms of trying to put a structure in place to deal with the broader Safety and Quality Assurance matters. While acknowledging that there were risks associated with this work, care was needed not to over-react without knowing what the full picture was, and the nature of the comparison with other authorities.
- In response to a Member's concern about having assurance that there was sufficient funding for assessments, the Learning Disabilities Area Manager noted that, even though there were more individuals receiving assessments and more pressure on workers, the assessment method had changed in accordance with the Health and Well-being Act and by now, there was more emphasis on preventative work and outcomes and now provided Services were provided in a more creative method. The importance of the third sector's role and the need for the service to ensure continuity to meet needs and develop individual opportunities such as through the OPUS programme, etc. was noted.
- In relation to establishing a Safeguarding Unit for adult services, it was confirmed that a new post had been advertised and a financial bid would be submitted to strengthen the Team in order to be able to improve the service's ability to respond effectively and to meet some of the expectations of the Inspectorate. An undertaking was given that the update on Team structures within the Department would be circulated to Members.
- In terms of supervision for staff, it was explained that an arrangement was implemented where the team's staff would receive supervision from Senior Practitioners, they received supervision from the County Manager and she was supervised by the Senior Manager. This arrangement was put in place in order to ensure professional development etc.

Resolved: To accept, note and thank the officer for the report and look forward to an update in this Scrutiny Committee in March 2017.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA OFFICES

A report from the Cabinet Member for Education was submitted, outlining the purpose of the development of the Area Offices.

(a) The Cabinet Member provided the background for the proposal, noting that specialists in the education field noted that leadership was important to uphold education standards. It was noted that school leaders were under significant pressure by having to manage staff, buildings, administration, lead the teaching within the school and, on some occasions, teach. The main purpose of developing Area Offices would be to be able to take some of the burden off school leaders in order to enable teachers to teach and Headteachers to lead.

It was highlighted that the proposed area offices were different to the area offices that existed in the past, and the main aim was to promote collaboration between schools on a number of levels.

(b) The Head of Education noted that there was more emphasis on regionalising the services these days and as an education service they were not eager to distance the service from the individuals. Due to the requirements in the three areas in Gwynedd being very different, the importance of creating a procedure that would be accountable locally and to ensure the correct kind of resources was noted.

Over the years, more pressure was put on the schools and, in establishing Area Offices, it was foreseen that it would be possible to remove the elements of administration and management through a procedure where teachers could share responsibilities over more than one site. It was noted that Headteachers felt that the pressure was high, especially in rural schools and in the smallest schools. As a result of cuts of £4.3m in schools' budget, the proposed structure would be a foundation in terms of support and enabling teachers and Headteachers to concentrate on educating children.

(c) An outline of the structure was received from the Area Education Manager that included sub-groups, which was re-establishing a County Quality Board that would supervise matters relating to well-being, safeguarding and improving education quality. In addition, in order to ensure local accountability, it was proposed to establish an Area Scrutiny Committee, to create partners locally to include an Area Manager / Business and Services Officer, School Challenge Advisor, Chair of Governors and two elected members in order to be able to scrutinise on a specific theme locally.

It was noted that governors were integral to the success of a school and, in order to promote strategic collaboration, it was proposed to establish a Strategic Catchment area Board to include Governing Body Chairs from the catchment area that would meet twice every term to hold training, discuss catchment area development plans in specific fields in order to remove the work burden from individuals in separate establishments. It was trusted that this would strengthen a closer relationship and local accountability to promote education standards in the schools.

The above would be accountable to the Education Management Team.

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

(a) That the structure appeared complicated and created another layer of administration.

(b) While welcoming change, it was asked how the new structure would be funded, especially in the current climate of cuts

In response, it was noted that funding had been approved for the first three years with a one-off bid. After that, the central education system would be required to shoulder the investment so that the model would be pushed forward. It was highlighted that the Education Department's central capacity was too small and if the situation was left as it was, the probability would be for the situation to deteriorate. It had to be borne in mind that some primary schools were small and they experienced staff recruitment difficulties. In terms of the above model, it would create an opportunity for a series of schools to be able to work together, hold discussions locally and offer solutions to move forward. This provided the initial grounds to support teachers to educate and Headteachers to lead.

(c) It was foreseen that it would be difficult to attract governors to training sessions.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Education noted that the pilot scheme was operational in the Moelwyn and Blaenau Ffestiniog areas, with Chairs of Governors coming together and, from their experience, saw it beneficial and an opportunity to discuss similar matters.

The Head of Education added that education standards in Gwynedd were good but that it was required to consider the future. A message was coming from the schools that they were buckling and that things were becoming increasingly difficult for them with a number of changes in the curriculum, and that they felt increasing pressure on the schools' Management Team. By attempting to improve conditions in the above model, time could be freed for the Management Teams. Currently, it was noted that Heads had to cope with the work of maintaining buildings, dealing with health and safety matters etc., but as part of the model, individuals in the area offices would be able to assist with this work for them.

Good examples were seen of regional services in terms of GwE but it reached a point where there was tension between standards of different authorities. Through the above model, it was possible to ensure on a regional level that the support and the sustenance would reach the schools in good time. Currently in Gwynedd, it was noted that no primary school was in a statutory category and it was hoped that no secondary school would be in that category either in the future.

There would be an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the model, giving an opinion to see if it would make a difference locally.

(ch) The Catholic Church representative asked for any re-designing to give attention to the principal of local management for schools that had been delegated appropriately to schools to manage their budget, and over the last 20 years, that much had happened in that development. It was noted that governing bodies took much more responsibilities, including dealing with budgets, buildings, etc. It was asked for any re-designing, to give appropriate consideration to changes that had already happened. It was specifically asked to acknowledge the enormous requirements that already existed on schools to attend meetings because headteachers were asked to spend much of their time in meetings already and that this created concern. Therefore, it was asked to consider carefully any structures that increased the number of meetings for Headteachers.

She added that, whilst accepting that there were some tensions between GwE and authorities, it was believed that they could be overcome. It had to be borne in mind that an enormous investment was made between the schools and GwE and re-structuring to implement the whole model to move education along.

(d) Concern that the Area Scrutiny Committee could include around 80 individuals.

In response, the Head of Education noted that the Area Scrutiny Committee would prioritise matters and, in turn, would invite a Chair / school staff to scrutinise them specifically to ensure local direction e.g. in the Mathematics field.

It was added, for broader clarity, that it would be required to formalise the sub-groups and create a terms of reference for them.

(dd) While welcoming the principal of restoring the Area Education Office and the need for support for schools, it would be sensible to establish offices first before building on the model.

(e) It was expressed that a failure to recruit Heads had been a problem due to a restriction on the applicants who were able to undertake the NPQH qualification. It was also felt that the requirements of the Colleges' qualifications to be able to undertake the teacher training course were too high.

In response, it was acknowledged that attracting applicants to undertake the NPQH qualification was a challenge, especially in the smallest schools because teachers did not obtain enough experience in terms of managing people.

(f) In terms of recruiting Heads, it was expressed that advertisements for Heads were limited to Gwynedd schools only and could the advertisement not be disseminated further.

In response, the Head of Education explained that it was the decision of the individual governing body to advertise, and that there was a substantial cost to advertise in the press.

(ff) The model could be analysed as a way to save money, namely to appoint Area Scrutiny Committees, appoint one Head for more than one school within the area and, as a result, teacher / headteacher posts would be lost.

(g) In response to a query regarding a number of Heads that were on a GwE secondment, the Head of Education said that the number of secondments had decreased and added that one of the disadvantages in Gwynedd was that the number of posts across the county asked for Welsh language ability and therefore, Gwynedd had lost more Heads / teachers in terms of percentage than other authorities.

(ng) In terms of feedback from the Heads about the changes, the Head of Education explained that it was not possible to maintain the provision as it was. While acknowledging that some would welcome it and others would not, he emphasised that there was a need to mature as a profession from the mindset of keeping everything separate and to be prepared to share resources so that it would be possible to collaborate locally.

(h) In response to an enquiry regarding the location of the Area Offices, it was explained that there would be two elements to the work, which was to be accountable locally but also they would be required to come together regionally.

(i) The Senior Corporate Support Manager explained that members of the Education Support Services Scrutiny Investigation had interviewed Heads of specific schools during the summer term and had received a very clear message regarding lightening the burden for schools in terms of decentralising work to release time. Therefore, in light of this, it was suggested that it would be beneficial for the three Area Officers to meet with the Scrutiny Investigation to discuss the details of the area offices model.

Resolved: (a) To accept, note and give thanks for the report.

(b) That the Scrutiny Committee supports the principle of establishing Area Officers as a step forward but it is wished for the Education Support Services Scrutiny Investigation to discuss with the three Area Officers the details of the model proposed and what would be decentralised to the area offices.

6. SUMMER EXAMINATIONS RESULTS 2016

The report of the Cabinet Member for Education was submitted outlining early information on the performance of end of key stages for the 2015/16 academic year.

(a) The Head of Education emphasised the need to respect the content of the report because initial conditional information on KS4 results was being shared due to having no access thus far to comparative benchmarked data for every key stage.

(b) It was noted that results were good in Gwynedd and specific attention was brought to the following:

- a significant improvement was seen in Key Stage 4 across a range of indicators
- KS3 results remained strong (in second place this year)
- That Key Stage / Key Stage 2 results were relatively static and needed to undertake a piece of work in terms of thresholds in these ages to identify good practices, a comparison with areas in south east Wales, teachers' assessments, etc.
- Attention needed to be given to KS3/KS4 in the fields of Welsh, English and Mathematics
- Need to improve the quality of the provision and achievement standards in KS5
- Attendance had significantly improved in KS4 and the Head of Education Department was very grateful; to the schools and education services for the support that was reflected in the results.

(c) The Cabinet Member for Education reiterated the praise and appreciation for the schools' staff and the central officers of the Education Department for their hard work in maintaining the performance that was specifically directed at TL2+ (68.5%) that was an increase of 5% on the 2015 performance and which had improved 13.5% since the beginning of this Council.

ch) In response to enquiries by individual Members, it was noted:-

- that the relationship with GwE had matured over the last two years and that it was possible to discuss specific local needs for Gwynedd through the business plan e.g. a new appointment was made for Mathematics in KS4 that had been a success
- A discussion could be held on the nature of the support needed locally and it was trusted that it would contribute towards making a difference to the results
- That the results of the inspections in Gwynedd had significantly improved.

Resolved: To accept and note the contents of the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12:35pm.

CHAIR.