
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 23/01/20

Present: Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Chair)
Councillor Elwyn Jones (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Freya Bentham, Steve Collings, Aled Evans, Selwyn Griffiths, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elin Walker Jones, Gareth Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dewi Roberts and Gareth Williams.

Officers present: Vera Jones (Democratic and Language Services Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Democratic Services Officer).

Present for item 5 below:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Nia Morris (Youth Service Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors: Dewi Owen, Elfed Roberts and Mair Rowlands.
Anest Gray Frazer (Church in Wales), Dilwyn Elis Hughes (UCAC) and David Healey (ATL)

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

Referring to item 7 in the minutes of the previous meeting - The Education and Economy and Community Departments' Savings Proposals, a member noted that she did not believe that the final sentence of the minute regarding the discussion and decision (b), despite being correct, was a true reflection of the nature of the discussion, bearing in mind that the committee had accepted the report, but had not approved its contents.

In response to the comment, the Chair noted that he was of the opinion that the paragraphs above the decision made it clear that the committee did not accept that the cuts were reasonable. The committee's opinion had been submitted to the Cabinet, which had later decided that it would not implement the savings.

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 21 November, 2019 as a true record.

5. UPDATE REPORT ON REMODELLING THE YOUTH SERVICE

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People providing the committee with an update on progress during the first year of remodelling.

The Cabinet Member set out the context, noting that the pre-report gave the narrative - the story of the journey – while the appendix, which in his opinion was the most important part,

detailed what had happened during the first year of remodelling, i.e. what had gone well and what had not gone so well. He explained that the main conclusion was that the work programme had been completed, but that the service remained on a long and constantly changing journey. That journey, in addition to being steered by legislation, was also steered by the young people of Gwynedd, and this was at the core of the entire journey. He further noted that one of the greatest problems was the challenge faced in terms of staff recruitment, especially workers for the community clubs. In terms of the impact assessment of the change, the report highlighted that no negative impacts had been identified. There was a great deal of work ongoing with groups such as the Urdd and a number of other third sector organisations, e.g. Frân Wen, and the partnership with those organisations was developing on a daily basis. He also noted that the incorporation of the Youth Service within the Children and Families Department had opened a number of doors to the service, which now collaborated far more with other departments within the Council, in addition to other agencies involved with young people's well-being.

During the discussion the following matters were raised:-

- Referring to paragraph 3.9 of the report, a member drew attention to the fact that a club had now been established at Brynchrug.
- In response to the local member's request for the service's help in finding a suitable location for the Penygroes Youth Club, it was noted that the service was aware of the challenges and was very willing to provide support. There had already been discussions held with the Education department, etc., and the intention was to attempt to hold further discussions, e.g., with the Byw'n Iach Centre.
- In response to a question, it was explained that the problem around recruiting staff for the community clubs derived from the fact that the clubs could not offer sufficient hours to make the positions full time posts, or even close to it. It also appeared that the nature of the work did not attract a high number of applicants for the posts.
- In terms of numbers, it was explained that each club required two members of staff, but that the aim was to have three at each location, to avoid having to close the club for a night due to illness. In such cases, there would always be an attempt to fill the gap with someone from Gwynedd Youth Club. However, they were not always available due to having arranged other activities.
- In terms of the provision in Pwllheli it was explained that the new model, as in other areas, would be visiting the town to run activities for a period of time. It was the young people themselves who chose the activities. Some of the community clubs had seen what was being offered in their communities by Gwynedd Youth Club and had decided that it was sufficient. It also appeared that young people were very prepared to travel to the clubs, and the service had purchased two vehicles to transport young people who had difficulty travelling; although it was acknowledged that this was far from sufficient. The new service also visited communities where there had been no previous activity.
- It was suggested that the service should contact the local members to let them know of what was happening in their wards so that they could promote the events and attend some of the evenings to socialise with the young people, should they wish to do so. In response, it was agreed that the idea of contact with the local member was a good one, and it was suggested that the service should undertake a piece of work on this.
- It was expressed that the report conveyed a very Utopian world, but that there was no reference to the Wales Audit Office's observations in its report published in September the previous year, which raised questions as to the method of implementing the service in its new form. The report noted that the service did not comply with the Well-being Act, or even with the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd.

Although the report brought before the Audit and Governance Committee noted that there were further discussions being held with the Inspectorate, there was no reference to this or to the result of the discussions included in the report to this committee. In response, it was noted that the service did not claim to have achieved perfection. It had been a very challenging time for the service's staff, and the service acknowledged that it was continuing on a journey in which the pathway was constantly changing. In terms of the report, it was noted that no official response had been received from the Care Inspectorate with regard to the challenge submitted. It was emphasised that the Inspectorate had not looked at the service from the perspective of what had been achieved for young people, but rather from the perspective of what consideration had been given to the Well-being Act in remodelling the service. It was explained that there were significant steps being taken to rectify this, and as the Youth Service was now part of the Children's Service, the Well-being Act was very high on its list of priorities.

- The partnership with other agencies was welcomed and enquiries were made as to whether there were any more creative ways of collaborating with those agencies in order to attract staff. In response, it was noted that the service was aware of the challenges and that it was looking at all possible ways of attracting people. Obviously, health and safety and data protection requirements, and so forth, added to the challenge.
- A member noted that he/she would like to know more about the situation in Bangor e.g. was there any collaboration with the schools and if so, which schools in particular? In response, it was noted that a general programme of the activities could be sent to the members to make them aware of what was happening in their areas.
- It was suggested that a task and finish group should be established to support the service in realising some of the objectives. It was noted that this was a matter to be raised in the informal meeting at the conclusion of this committee.
- In response to a question, it was explained that it was youth workers who arranged and paid for locations for activities bought by the Gwynedd service, and it was emphasised that the local member's support was very important in this respect.
- In response to an observation, it was agreed that engaging with those young people who did not use the service was a challenge, but that it was the role of the professional community worker to ask and find out what the wishes of the young people were. The schools were also very supportive in terms of engagement with the young people and this linked well with the work of tracking NEETS young people (namely those not in work, education or training). It was also noted that youth workers were prepared to arrange anything should a cohort of young people approach them.
- In response to a question, the Cabinet Member noted that he was satisfied that the service was consistent across the county and that the same opportunities were available to young people everywhere. As this was a mobile service, it went to all kinds of small places and reached young people in those rural communities which had been impossible to cover previously.
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the failure to establish a club in Porthmadog. In response, it was noted that the service and Porthmadog Town Council had made a considerable effort to establish a club in the town, but had been unsuccessful in recruiting staff to run it.
- It was suggested that the service should release a Monthly Events Calendar, rather than the weekly version currently produced, as this would make it easier for the young people to plan ahead.

- It was noted that the service was working in an environment of cuts, and an enquiry was made as to whether best practice in other councils / organisations had been looked at, and whether this had been successful. In response, it was noted that there was a constant process of looking at arrangements elsewhere, but as a result of having to remodel the Gwynedd service in 2018, it was believed that youth services across Wales now looked at this Council's arrangements. It was trusted that the service in Gwynedd would continue to change and continue to respond to the challenges facing it.
- An enquiry was made as to whether there were plans to extend the Language Charter to youth clubs. In response, it was noted that all the youth workers led the activities through the medium of Welsh, but that the point regarding the adoption of the Language Charter was something the service should look at.
- It was noted that it was important to bear in mind when providing the service that the Assembly had voted to lower the voting age in Wales to 16. In response, it was agreed that this was timely, and it was noted that the Democratic Services Committee was looking at this. It was also noted that a pilot scheme had been established in Y Bala, in which officers went to the secondary school to initiate the discussion with young people; not only those who would be voting, but also the youngest pupils.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and the Youth Service Manager for the report, summarising the main conclusions of the report as follows:-

- The recruitment of workers had been, and continued to be, an evident problem.
- There was a need to ensure better contact with local members in order for them to be a means of promoting the service.
- The Events Calendar should be published monthly rather than weekly.
- The service should look at adopting the Language Charter.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

The Cabinet Member thanked the committee for its support and the discussion, and extended an invitation for members to get in touch with any further observations or ideas.

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 12.20 pm

CHAIRMAN