

PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 6 February 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Non Dafydd, Jeff M Evans, John Ifan Jones,
Euryn Morris, Derek Owen, Ken Taylor, Sonia Williams.

Co-opted Members:

Mrs Gillian Thompson (Parent Governor – Primary Schools Sector)
Mrs Wenda Owen (The Church in Wales)

Portfolio Members

Leader of the Council – Councillor Llinos Medi (for item 4)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive,
Deputy Chief Executive,
Head of Democracy (DS),
Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) (AE),
Policy & Welsh Language Manager (FO),
Scrutiny Manager (AD),
Scrutiny Officer (EA),
Committee Officer (MEH).

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Pip O'Neill and Margaret Murley Roberts

Councillor Alun Roberts – Portfolio Member for Adults' Services

Director of Education, Skills and Young People

ALSO PRESENT:

Portfolio Members

Councillor Carwyn Jones – Portfolio Member for Corporate &
Customer Experience;
Councillor Gary Pritchard – Deputy Leader & Portfolio Member for
Children, Youth & Housing Services;
Councillor Dafydd Roberts – Portfolio Member for Education &
Welsh Language;
Councillor Dafydd R Thomas – Portfolio Member for Highways,
Property & Waste.

1 APOLOGIES

As noted above.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None received.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January, 2024 were confirmed as correct.

4 EDUCATION SCRUTINY PANEL - PROGRESS REPORT

Submitted – a progress report by the Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel.

The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Gwilym O Jones said that Education is one of the six key strategic aims of the Council Plan, and it is considered that Elected Members have a crucial role in realising this aim by scrutinising and holding to account and the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel contributes towards this aim. He noted that this is the Panel's third progress report and covers the period September 2023 – January 2024. The Panel met on 4 occasions during this period and considered the following matters :-

- Integrated Joint Working Model;
- Wellbeing/Mental Health/Safeguarding;
- Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion;
- Schools Placed in Category, Estyn Follow Up or Receiving Additional Support;
- Scrutiny Panel work programme for the period May 2023 – April 2024.

During consideration of the report questions were raised as to how to health and welfare of pupils are monitored. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that there have been many examples of good practice in schools on Anglesey as regards to health and welfare and schools share good practices. Further questions were raised as to whether the Panel has considered, within their forward work programme, as to how the budgetary savings will have an effect on the progress of schools and also whether the Panel has a strategy to monitor the effects. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that continued monitoring will be undertaken on the effect of the budgetary savings by the Learning Service and the Scrutiny Panel will receive regular reports. He noted that the Panel Members will have an opportunity to visit the schools and invite representatives from the schools before the Panel. The Chief Executive said that a joint meeting of the Finance Scrutiny Panel and the Education Scrutiny Panel will meet at the end of this month to consider the impacts of the potential efficiency savings on the education provision. He also said that there are uncertainties as regards to grant funding to schools and discussions will be undertaken within the joint meeting of both Panels on the impact from the next financial year onwards.

Reference was made as to what suggestions can the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee have to further strengthen the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel. The Chair of the Panel responded that it would be advantageous for the Panel to receive suggestions as to the areas within the Learning Service from Members of this Committee who are not members of the Panel. Questions were raised as to whether 'voice of the pupil' and 'voice of the parents/guardians' are considered as part of the scrutiny process. The Scrutiny Manager responded that as part of the Panel's Forward Work Programme the Panel will be scrutinizing the matter raised as to the 'voice of the learner'. Further questions were raised as to whether the Panel consider that they need to receive specific areas of work that they are not having the opportunity to consider. The Chair of the Panel responded that the Panel meets on a regular basis and discusses with the relevant Officers as to the areas within the Learning Service that they wish to receive and to scrutinize. He noted that the Learning Service has provided the Education Scrutiny Panel with reports on each area of work the Panel have requested. He emphasised that the meetings of the Panel are confidential as matters are discussed as regards to individual schools. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) noted that the School Improvements Guidelines should become statutory in September 2024 and the Education Scrutiny Panel will have an opportunity to discuss and scrutinize the arrangements.

Reference was made to the effect on social media and protection of children whilst viewing different websites and the potential bullying that can arise from social media. Questions were raised as to whether web-safety issues are considered. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that all matters relating to safeguarding are important, including web-safety within the schools and a Data Protection Officer and Safeguarding Officer are available to support schools within the Learning Service. . He noted that there are policies, guidelines and processes available to support web-safety.

Reference was made that the progress report discusses availability of the latest data on school attendance, exclusions, and de-registrations in the Local Authority schools. Questions were raised as to what concerns does this data raise. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that school attendances are lower than pre-covid and whilst there are concerns this has been the trend across Wales since the pandemic. He noted that it is important to work with the schools and the governors to raise school attendances and to monitor exclusions within the schools. Further questions were raised as to whether there are trends in the school absences. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that there are no specific trends identified by the Learning Services, but that the Learning Service are using designated Officers to engage with families to target the issues of school attendances.

Questions were raised as to whether there are positive effects within the schools are regards to 'Trauma Informed'. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that considerable work has been undertaken within schools as

regards to 'Trauma Informed' and every school is committed to the work being undertaken. He noted that it was too soon to report on the effects, and it will take a few years to be able to gauge the effect that it will have on the schools.

Further questions were raised as to how the Learning Service will be able to monitor the gap in the achievement of pupils who receive free school meals and those who do not receive free school meals in the future as all primary school children will receive free school meals in Wales. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that the guidelines, which are non-statutory at the moment, put the responsibilities on the governing bodies of schools to ensure that schools priorities reflect the need to ensure equality within education for each individual pupil with the support of the Learning Service. The Deputy Chief Executive said that the 'Free School Meals Measure' has been approved by Welsh Government that all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by the end of 2024. He further said that discussions continue with Welsh Government as regards to the specific challenges within the 'Measure'.

Questions were raised as to the long-term strategy of the Learning Service for the future. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that whilst there will be financial challenges for schools and the governing bodies, and the Learning Service will need to evaluate the short-term and long-term strategies within the schools. He gave an example that each school has a Schools Development Plan which evaluates the short and long-term programmes within the schools and working with GwE is an important element for the success within schools. He further said that collaboration within the schools is important and to be able to share good practice is an important element for improvements. Further questions were raised whether there are concerns to the reduction of the support from GwE. The Chief Executive responded that there will be a reduction in grants and there will a review of the middle tier provision of GwE. Details of the timetable as regards to the changes to the support from educational consortia is awaited. He noted that there will be significant changes in the responsibilities that GwE currently has within the six local authorities they support at present. The Chief Executive said that there has been discussion taking place between the six local authorities over the last few months to protect the important provision afforded by GwE. He further said that significant changes will need to be dealt with in the future as regards to the changes that will affect the schools and the Education Scrutiny Panel will be informed of the challenges that will need to be address for the best provision for the pupils in the schools.

Reference was made to the shortage of Educational Psychologist. Questions were raised to how long pupils are now having to await to be assessed. The Senior Manager (Secondary Schools) responded that there is a shortage of Educational Psychologist, especially bilingual psychologists, and children are having to wait to be assessed for a period of time. The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel said that discussion have taken place within the Panel as regards to the shortage of Educational Psychologist throughout Wales.

It was RESOLVED to note the progress made during the last period in terms of the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel.

ACTION : As noted above.

5 STRATEGIC EQUALITIES PLAN : 2024-2028

Submitted – a report by the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer.

The Leader of the Council said that the Strategic Equality Plan is a key publication that aligns with the Council Plan and will contribute to the achievement of its strategic objectives and vision. She noted that the Strategic Equality Plan is an ambitious Plan so as to build a fairer society for the people of Anglesey. Creating an Anglesey where people can thrive means recognising that there are many causes of inequality and doing all possible to address them and to make sure that everyone is treated equally. She noted that an Annual Equality report will be submitted in due course to this Committee.

During consideration of the report reference was made that the draft plan contains eight equality objectives. Questions were raised that in view of the current economic climate, whether this is too ambitious. The Leader of the Council responded that it is important that the people of Anglesey are at the foremost in the services provided by the Council. She said that it will be challenging to achieve the objectives within the Plan, however, the Council is currently committed to strengthening equality and examples have already been given when discussing the previous item as regards to education. Further questions were raised as to how it is intended to measure the progress to reach the objectives contained within the Plan. The Head of Democracy responded that there will be an internal Steering Group who will monitor the Annual Action Plan with the main task to develop performance indicators. He noted that the membership of the Steering Group is yet to be agreed until the Equality Plan has been approved. The Leader of the Council said that the Steering Group will show who has the corporate ownership regarding each equality objective to ensure that each department takes its part in developing the objectives.

Questions were raised as to what is intended over the next four years to raise awareness and increase knowledge of equality and diversity within the Council. The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that it is hoped that there will be increased focus on equality within the Council with regular reminders/messages distributed, as is similar with the Welsh language, to staff and elected members. She noted that there has been progress with equalities and diversity as it has been included as a general principle within the Council's Plan which highlights expectations as equalities is an expectation across the Council. The Steering Group will set out a strategic direction for equalities within the Council. She further said that it is important that when new employees are employed by the Authority that they are made aware of the expectations towards equalities and diversity and managers have also a central role in promoting the expectations.

Reference was made the objective 3 : Social Care and Wellbeing within the Equality Plan. Questions were raised as to what the challenges the Authority will face in seeking to deliver this equality objective due to cost-of-living crisis and making sure that that aspirations of the Council to make sure that everyone can have a place to call a home and to develop and thrive. The Leader of the Council responded that this Council wishes to show their ambitions to improve the lives of the residents of Anglesey. She expresses strongly that she wishes to see equality across the services of the Council and to have the ambition to improve the lives of the residents of the Island. The Vice-Chair said that it is important that the Strategic Equality Plan refers to the objectives for older people in society. He referred to the importance of the membership of the Council in the Older Peoples Forum and the Welsh Health Organisation – Older People. He expressed that it is important to note that people need to be given the opportunity to be able to respond to consultation processes as not everyone is able to communicate on-line and need paper copies of documentation. The Leader of the Council responded that copies of consultation documents i.e., consultation on the budget, are available within the local libraries as it is important that everyone has the opportunity to respond.

Reference was made to Objective 3 within the Plan as regards to ‘living standards. An example was given as regards to housing developments through the planning process. It was expressed that there is a need for improvements as regards to communicating with people and developers when proposed large developments can have a detrimental effect on small villages. Comments were also made as to the need for affordable housing for young people, but they must be affordable when they are built on the border of expensive areas on the Island. The Leader of the Council responded that it is important to conform with the legal policies as regards to the planning process. She noted that it is important that residents within local communities have the opportunity to express their opinions with the planning process. The Chief Executive said that it is important that the landowners and developers need to engage effectively within rural local communities when proposed planning development are submitted. Further questions were raised as empty social housing on the Island whilst people are in dire need of a home. The Leader of the Council responded that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee have raised the issue of empty homes through the Corporate Scorecard and a Task and Finish Group has been established to improve the process to enable the empty homes being let.

Reference was made to Objective 2 : Work within the Strategic Equality Plan. Questions were raised as to how action will be undertaken to ensure equal opportunities and to reduce the pay gaps. The Leader of the Council gave an example as regards to the Free Port status and the reasons as to why the Authority delayed in expressing their interest in a Free Port status at the beginning of the process as was in England. She said that worker’s rights were not safeguarded at the beginning of the process and as an Authority worker’s rights are a core principle within the consultation process with developers. The Chief Executive said that whilst the Equality Plan refers to the action to ensure that the

Council is an equal opportunities employer and to reduce the pay gap and this can result as an indirect influence on others as the Leader has referred to as part of the Free Port process. He noted that Task and Finish Group could discuss the matter in detail over the next 18 months to ensure that workers are appreciated and respected for their work.

It was RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive that the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 be approved.

ACTION : Consider the appropriateness of adapting the title Equality Objective (Work) in order to provide clarity regarding the Council's role as an employer.

6 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 2023/2024

The report of the Scrutiny Manager setting out the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee's indicative Forward Work Programme 2023/2024 was presented for consideration.

It was RESOLVED to :-

- **Agree the current version of the forward work programme for 2023/2024;**
- **Note the progress thus far in implementing the forward work programme.**

The meeting concluded at 3.30 pm

**COUNCILLOR DYLAN REES
CHAIR**