

PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 19 September 2023

- PRESENT:** Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O Jones (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Non Dafydd, Jeff M Evans, John Ifan Jones, Euryr Morris, Pip O'Neill, Margaret Murley Roberts, Ken Taylor and Sonia Williams
- Mr John Tierney (Roman Catholic Church) (Co-opted Member)
Mrs Gillian Thompson (Parent Governor – Primary Schools Sector)
- Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Economic Development
- Councillor Dafydd Roberts – Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive,
Deputy Chief Executive,
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer,
Director of Education, Skills and Young People,
Head of Democracy,
Executive Manager (Leadership Team) (SOJ) (for item 4 only),
Scrutiny Manager,
Committee Officer (MEH).
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Derek Owen
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Neville Evans – Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism and Maritime;
Councillor Carwyn Jones – Portfolio Member for Corporate and Customer Experience;
Councillor Alun Roberts – Portfolio Member for Adults' Services;
Councillor Nicola Roberts – Portfolio Member for Planning, Public Protection and Climate Change;
Councillor Dafydd R Thomas – Portfolio Member for Highways, Property and Waste;
Councillor Robin Williams – Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Finance.
- Councillors Dyfed W Jones and Keith Roberts (Members of the Education Scrutiny Panel).
- Mr Arwyn Thomas, Mrs Sharon Vaughan & Ms Gwenno Jones (Representatives from GwE)
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The Chair welcomed Mrs Gillian Thompson as Parent Governor – Primary Schools Sector representative to her first meeting of this Committee.

1 APOLOGIES

As noted above.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Dylan Rees declared a prejudicial interest in Item 4, North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority Consultation (Emergency Cover Review) and left the meeting during discussion and voting thereon.

Councillors Jeff Evans and John I Jones declared a personal interest in Item 4 – North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June, 2023 were confirmed as correct.

4 NORTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES CONSULTATION (EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW)

(As the Chair of the Committee had declared a prejudicial interest in this item the Vice-Chair was in the Chair for this item. Councillor Ken Taylor was elected as Vice-Chair for this item only).

The report of the Chief Executive was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Vice-Chair in the Chair said that the Chief Fire Officer for the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service gave a presentation to a Members Briefing Session in July. He noted that proposals and options were highlighted by the Chief Fire Officer as regards to the consultation document in respect of an Emergency Cover Review. It was reported that additional comments have been received by the Chief Fire Officer following the publication of the Agenda for this meeting and the Committee will have an opportunity to respond to these comments.

The Leader of the Council said that the consultation refers to the Emergency Cover Review of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service with 3 Options put forward for discussion and consultation together with costs implications. A draft response on behalf of the County Council has been attached to the report. She noted that it was important that the Scrutiny Committee be given the opportunity to make comments on the draft response. She further said that the majority of the funding for the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service is received by way of levy from the six unitary Authorities within the area. The Council pays into this combined fund and the contribution is based on population. Any change in the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service budget would consequently impact on the levy contributions and would result in added pressure on the Council's budget.

The Executive Manager (Leadership Team) said that the consultation period to respond to the Emergency Cover Review by the North Wales Fire & Rescue

Authority will come to an end at the end of this month. She noted that the intention of the draft response to the consultation is to summarise the main concerns the Council wishes to highlight.

The Chief Executive said that Option 3 within the consultation document will have an effect on the Island but the other two options would not have an effect on the service provided by the Fire & Rescue Authority but would result in financial impact on the local authorities.

In considering the report, the Committee discussed the following main matters:-

- Questions were raised as to whether the Fire & Rescue Service has considered reviewing its central administration costs in order to save front-line services. The Chief Executive responded that similar questions were asked last year whilst setting the levy as regards the administration cost to save front-line services. He noted that as is similar within this Authority central administrative costs have been reduced over the years. He further said that following the publication of the Agenda for this Committee the Fire & Rescue Authority has seen the draft consultation response and have provided details that they have reduced their costs of up to 10% over the last 10 years. It is also shown that the central costs of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service has the lowest central costs than any other Fire Authority in Wales. However, the Chief Executive considered that the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority needs to revisit its central administrative costs in view of the financial pressures. The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer said that similar questions have been raised during meetings of the Section 151 Officers of the six local authorities in North Wales with the Fire & Rescue Service Financial Officers as regards to central costs. He noted that there needs to be further discussions with the Fire & Rescue Service to ascertain whether there is fair comparison with the other two Fire & Rescue Services in Wales as regards to central costs.
- Questions were raised as to whether the Council's response to the consultation adequately reflects the views of the Council. The Chief Executive responded that the draft response to the Fire & Rescue Authority consultation documents is an Officer's response which has been shared informally with the Executive Members. They confirmed that the draft response is appropriate to be considered by the Scrutiny process to re-enforce and strengthen the initial draft response.
- Questions were raised as to what gaps there are in the draft response to the consultation. The Chief Executive responded that the Council will need to review and update the response to the consultation following receipt of the additional information received from the Chief Fire Officer and following discussions at this meeting and thereafter, the Executive Committee at its meeting to be held on the 26 September. He referred that it is an option for the Fire and Rescue Authority to set up a Task and Finish Group to review its core costs with the Section 151 Officers in attendance.
- Questions were raised as to why the Council Tax Levy towards the Fire & Rescue Authority is not visible on the Council Tax Bills. The Chief Executive responded that legislation sets out that the Levy towards the Fire & Rescue Authority is not shown on the Council Tax Bills. He suggested that a letter be sent to Welsh Government to request that they reconsider this legislation in the

future. The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer said that legislation regulates who is allowed to charge a precept on the Council Tax i.e. Police Authority and Town and Community Councils; the Fire & Rescue Authority can charge a levy and Welsh Government legislation does not allow local authorities to show the charge of such levy on the Council Tax Bills; it does show on the Council's website and the leaflet accompanying the Council Tax Bills to show how the Authority spends its funding.

- Reference was made to the response of the Chief Fire Officer to the draft response prepared by the Council. Questions were raised as to whether the documentation before the Committee will change the perspective of the response of the Council significantly and whether there will need for further scrutiny of the documentation. The Leader of the Council responded that due to the time constraints of the consultation the Leadership Team have discussed the response to the consultation as regards to Emergency Cover Review and it was considered important that this Scrutiny Committee be given the opportunity to forward recommendations to the Executive on the draft response prepared on behalf of the Council.
- Reference was made to Option 3 within the documentation with regard to possible options of the closure of the Fire Station at Beaumaris. Councillor Alun Roberts a Local Member for the Seiriol Ward expressed that it was considered that the option to close the Fire Station in Beaumaris would result in putting lives in danger due to resilience of both bridges due to weather conditions and the rural communities in the south east of the Island. He noted that the highways structure in the area experience continued flooding. He further said that there are 2 Care Homes in the area. The Chief Executive responded that the matters raised will be noted within the draft response.

It was RESOLVED :-

- **To accept the initial draft response of the Council as attached to the report subject to that the following:-**
- **That the Leadership Team should consider the additional information received by the Chief Fire Officer;**
 - **To propose the following comments for consideration by the Leadership Team as part of the review process before the Executive at its meeting on 26 September, 2023:-**
 - **To request that the North Wales Fire & Rescue Service conduct a review of their administrative and central costs as a basis for setting the levy contribution incorporating the input of the Section 151 Officers in North Wales;**
 - **To request Welsh Government to consider that the levy charged by the Fire & Rescue Service should be noted on the Council Tax Bills for local residents;**
 - **That factors within Option 3 within the report needs to be considered as regards to the resilience of both bridges due to**

weather conditions and the rural communities in the South East of the Island;

- **To note that there are additional costs implications included in the three Options put forward by the North Wales & Rescue Service.**

5 EDUCATION MATTERS

- **GwE Annual Report for the Isle of Anglesey : 2022/2023**

Submitted – a report by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People for consideration by the Committee.

The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language said that he welcomed the report and the joint working with GwE has resulted in the majority of schools on Anglesey performing well.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People reported that the Local Authority works in a close and effective partnership with GwE. GwE is the regional education consortium for North Wales and works in partnership with Anglesey's Learning Service in terms of improving schools, sharing good practice, knowledge and skills, increasing local strengths and building capacity. He noted that the report includes appendices on the Progress and Impact in Secondary and Special Schools; Progress and Impact in Primary Clusters and Data on Training and Support for Anglesey. Priorities have been identified to be developed further in the secondary schools' improvement plans as noted within the report.

In considering the report, the Committee discussed the following main matters:-

- Questions were raised as to what are the standards within Anglesey's schools at present and to what extent does GwE's work have an impact on standards in Anglesey schools. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that regular meetings are undertaken with GwE's representatives to discuss the standards in every schools', teaching and learning, leadership and other matters as required. The schools' evaluation processes are improving and GwE's role focuses on leadership within the schools. He noted that each schools have their own support plan which is based on the needs of the school and progress of these needs within the schools is discussed in regular meetings with GwE's representatives. He further said that the role of the Governing Bodies within the schools are imperative to process detailed information as regards to standards within the schools. Mrs Sharon Vaughan, Senior Leader GwE's (Secondary Schools) referred to the Secondary Sector and said that GwE meets with the leaders within the schools to support and plan improvements within the schools. Each school visit each of the 5 secondary schools on the Island so as to gauge the standards within the schools which can identify the strengths and the areas that need to be improved. Mrs Gwenno Jones, Senior leader GwE (Primary Schools) referred to the Primary Sector and said that work is undertaken to evaluate improvement priorities within the primary schools.

Groups of Headteachers meet on a regular basis together with school staff to discuss the improvements needed and to share good practices within each school.

- Reference was made to GwE's report referring that *'intensive support has been given to one secondary school on the Island to try to improve the quality and effectiveness of senior leadership. They remain on the recovery journey and continue to receive intensive support. In this school, although areas requiring development are correctly identified, the planning for improvement and culture for ensuring joint improvements are not strong enough.'* Questions were raised as to whether this was a fair criticism and what is currently being undertaken to improve the situation at this school. The Director of Education Skills and Young People responded that every school that raises concerns receives specific support with an intensive support plan in place to view the areas that need to be improved. He further said that a multi-agency Board is established and the school reports on progress within the priorities identified for improvement and further support is put in place if required thereafter. Mr Arwyn Thomas, Managing Director GwE highlighted the processes put in place by GwE to support the improvement required within the school. He further said that other processes on a regional level will need to be put in place if no improvement are identified within the school.
- Reference was made to the financial climate and pressure on the budget of local authorities in the future. Questions were raised as to whether GwE will be looking at the central and administrative costs of GwE in order to safeguard frontline services to schools. The Managing Director GwE responded that GwE has had continued cuts to their financial budgets over the last 10 years. He noted that the support from GwE has been important to the Authority in the improvement within the Island's schools. He further said that the Estyn Inspection Reports have highlighted the support GwE has given to the Authority to improve the educational services within the schools. Mr Thomas further referred that GwE has conducted numerous restructuring over the years to address financial challenges. The implications of reducing the service afforded could have a detrimental effect on the improvements within the schools. Further questions were raised as GwE's financial budgets will be reduced will GwE be able to afford the services currently afforded to the Local Authority? Mr Thomas responded that a risk assessment will be undertaken to address any reduction within the budget and may result in the reduced support of GwE to the schools.
- Questions were raised as to what the main challenges faced by Anglesey schools, the Learning Service and GwE. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that the main challenges are social challenges, behaviour challenges, attendance, complex special educational needs, effect of covid, change in attitude towards learning which are all national challenges. He further said that any financial cuts affecting schools will have challenges for schools in respect of staffing and ultimately on standards. Discussions will be undertaken with GwE to ensure that any budgetary reductions will have the minimum effect on the support given to the schools on Anglesey.
- Questions were raised as to why the Welsh Language standards differ from one school to another and whether there is room for improvement. The

Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that there are challenges nationally due to the use of the Welsh Language in different schools. He noted that each town and community have a different perspective in the use of the Welsh language. He referred that the Authority has a Welsh Language Strategic Plan to meet the priority of Welsh Governments' ambition to see the number of people able to speak the Welsh Language. He noted that the schools are prioritising the Welsh Language with all schools bar two, placed in the highest Welsh Language category possible. The Managing Director – GwE said that each primary school will need a transition plan for the transfer to secondary schools and the Welsh Language needs to be central to the transition plan.

- Questions were raised as to how the Learning Support Assistants are able to access training development as their contracts do not allow for non-contact time within schools at present. The Managing Director – GwE responded that training to the HTLA's is afforded to develop the needs of pupils with different needs. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that training is afforded through the Training programme of the Local Authority and the HTLA's are able to progress with training development within their role in the classroom.
- Reference was made to the conditions of school building and especially to the RAAC concrete problems identified in two secondary schools on the Island. The Chief Executive responded that a review of school building has been undertaken annually since 2020. He noted that two schools were identified with RAAC concrete structural problems and both schools responded efficiently to the situation with putting different learning methods in place. The RAAC concrete problem at the David Hughes Secondary School is not as bad as it is at Holyhead High School and mid and long-term solutions are currently being discussed. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that he wished to thank the staff at both schools in ensuring the continued learning of pupils is being undertaken. Discussions have been undertaken with Estyn, WJEC and GwE so as to ensure support for the learning and teaching within these schools.

It was RESOLVED to accept the GwE Annual Report for the Isle of Anglesey : 2022/2023.

- **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 this is the third progress report of the Panel which covers the period February – September, 2023. He noted that the Panel met on seven occasions during this period and considered the following matters :-

- Wales Additional Learning Needs Code;
- Elective Home Education;
- Self-evaluation – impact of the Education Scrutiny Panel's work;
- The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan : 2022-2032;

- Schools placed in a category, requiring follow up or additional support from Estyn;
- Developing Effective Collaboration – looking in detail at how the Learning Service creates the conditions for effective partnership working;
- Model for Education Scrutiny – Education Scrutiny Charter;
- GwE Annual Report for Anglesey : 2022/2023;
- Scrutiny Panel work programme for the period May 2023- April 2024

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that he appreciated the work and support of the Education Scrutiny Panel to the Learning Service.

In considering the report, the Committee discussed the following main matters:-

- Questions raised as to what other areas should the Panel be scrutinizing? The Chair of the Panel responded that a Work Programme has been developed as was noted within the report. The Scrutiny Manager said that the Panel will focus on Mental Health, Well-being, Safeguarding, Integrated Collaboration Model, Curriculum for Wales, Additional Learning Needs, Inclusion and the Voice of the Learner.
- Reference was made to GwE's Annual Report and specifically to attendances and absences in schools and especially after the pandemic. Questions were raised whether the Education Scrutiny Panel should consider absences in schools within their work programme. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that Well-being Officers and Inclusion Officers attend the Scrutiny Panel and the Panel has an item on their work programme in January 2024 to discuss attendance and absences in schools.
- Reference was made to more parents electing home schooling for their children. Questions were raised whether the Panel can review the home schooling provision. The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel said that the elective home-schooling has been considered by the Panel and continued monitoring of the matter will be undertaken.
- Questions were raised as to what degree is the Scrutiny Committee satisfied with the direction of the Panel's work? The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee said that the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel has been recognized as an example of good practice nationally. He noted that the added value of the scrutiny process within the Scrutiny Panel is evident from the progress reports that are submitted to the parent Committee.
- Questions were raised as to what degree is the Panel aware of standards in individual schools and what monitoring arrangements are in place? The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel responded that progress reports are submitted to the Scrutiny Panel by the Officer's within the Learning Service on a regular basis. Detailed discussions are undertaken within the Panel with Officer's reporting in detail on different topics.

- The Chair of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) referred that the Education Scrutiny Panel undertakes scrutiny on religious studies and ethnics. She questioned whether the Education Charter should refer to the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education when the Scrutiny Panel discusses religious studies in schools and whether this is undertaken in other areas. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that SACRE is considered important within the Learning Service. He said that discussion on SACRE would be advantageous within the Education Scrutiny Panel.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **To note the progress made during the last period in terms of the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel;**
- **That significant progress has been made in terms of developing a revised scrutiny model for education issues as a basis for the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel and both parent committees.**
- **Education Scrutiny Charter**

Submitted – a report by the Director of Education, Skills and Young People and the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer in respect of the above.

The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language said that he welcomed the Education Scrutiny Charter which outlines as to the scrutiny process.

In considering the report, the Committee discussed the following main matters:-

- Questions were raised as to what are the main drivers behind producing a Scrutiny Charter for Education matters? The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that the main drivers behind producing a Scrutiny Charter for Education is to create an effective scrutiny process which results in the Education Scrutiny Panel being able to challenge and support the Learning Service. The Education Scrutiny Charter also responds to Estyn requirements within their Inspection Report of the Learning Service recently.
- Questions were raised as to what extent is the implementation of the Charter bound by financial implications? The Scrutiny Manager responded that there are no financial implications bound to the implementation of the Charter. The Charter is a basis for the scrutiny principles for the whole Council.
- Questions were raised regarding the introduction of a Charter as a basis for the Scrutiny work of the Council is an additional element to existing local processes. What arrangements are in place in other local authorities? The Scrutiny Manager responded that there are other developments in the introduction of Scrutiny Charter within other authorities, however, they will focus on different priorities within their local authorities.

- Reference was made that there is no reference to SACRE Committee within the Education Scrutiny Charter. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that SACRE will be included within the Education Scrutiny Charter.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **To approve the Education Scrutiny Charter as a basis for the scrutiny of Education issues;**
- **To note the aim of developing the document in due course as a general Scrutiny Charter across the breadth of scrutiny work undertaken by the Council.**

6 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

It was RESOLVED:-

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

**COUNCILLOR DYLAN REES
CHAIR**