

Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2024-25

Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire

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Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council



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Chair's Foreword



As the Chair of the Committee, I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Committee continues to consider the ongoing challenges of the Post-Covid Era and the Cost-of-Living Crisis which impacts on the educational and social needs of our community. The Committee's pre-decision method of scrutiny enables members to influence and respond to actions during the planning and development of policies and strategies as well as to assess performance over relevant service areas. The Committee has also identified its own topics for investigation and has continued to assess ongoing themes.

During the year the Committee scrutinised progress with the Council's Well-being Objectives, in particular Start Well and Prosperous Communities. In considering the roll-out of the provision across Carmarthenshire, the Committee highlighted the significance of the Pupil Development Grant funding available for schools as parents/guardians were no longer required to apply for free school meals.

The Committee considered a synopsis of the eight Strategic Focus Groups which detailed the remit, membership, meeting schedule and reporting mechanisms for each education priority area. The Committee began to review the progress of each of the Focus Groups individually and will continue with a two-year review programme until all the Focus Groups' progress and delivery has been assessed.

Representations were made to both the UK and Welsh Government expressing significant concerns regarding funding cuts impacting our children and young people. Members also considered the financial pressures faced by individual schools, and projected deficit balances are a significant concern. A seconded Headteacher is working alongside our schools to address the challenges of budget constraints and to generate action plans. The Committee continues to participate in the consultations on the Modernising Education Programme.

The Committee considered reports on School Attendance Levels and Supporting Behaviour across the county's schools. Both these issues will be re-visited by the Committee to track progress and share good practice. A recent forum of Headteachers emphasised the challenges and opportunities presented with challenging behaviour and increasing numbers of young persons with Additional Learning Needs, including Autism.

Estyn School Report Publications are shared with members to identify emerging issues. The Estyn Inspection Report of Carmarthenshire's Education Services provides a template reflecting the positive elements in the report and the three recommendations on areas for improvement, including pupil attendance, school improvement processes and refining approaches to self evaluation and improvement planning. These will continue to be monitored over the coming year.

The Carmarthenshire Youth Council fulfils a valuable role in highlighting concerns such as Bullying, Children's Rights, Mental Health, Period Dignity and Domestic Violence, and provides an insight into their role in decision-making - both locally and nationally.

Members noted the importance of music education in relation to the personal development of our children and young people.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is receiving consideration by the Committee, with assessments made on progress against the seven outcomes detailed within the Plan. An update on the Welsh for Adults provision is being addressed by the Committee, including the options in terms of the future provision of the Service.

I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their valuable input over the past year in providing an internal and external viewpoint on the effectiveness of the Authority's provision. A special thanks to Cllr. Carys Jones for chairing the committee for the past two years.

I would also like to thank Democratic Services and Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Officers for their dedication and professionalism in supporting the work of the Committee. Their preparation for Workshops and Development Sessions in addition to formal meetings is significant and underpins the work of the Committee across all areas. Diolch yn fawr.

A particular thanks to Julie Owens for administering and servicing the Committee, and a warm welcome to the new Director, Owain Lloyd. Croeso i Sir Gar.

The Committee's priorities will be reflected in future work programmes, and some flexibility is provided to allow members to be pro-active as new issues arise. The formal policy and strategic meetings will be complemented by workshops and school visits. I look forward to continuing to work with Members, Co-opted Members and Officers in the year ahead.

Councillor Emlyn Schiavone

Chair of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

The Scrutiny function is a key element of the County Council's governance arrangements and decision-making process. Although not a decision-making body, Scrutiny is at its most effective when it grasps the potential to influence and inform decisions made by both the Council and partner bodies across the county.

Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution requires all Scrutiny Committees to "*prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committee's activities over the previous year*".

This report highlights the work undertaken by the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year. It aims to provide members with an opportunity to reflect on its achievements, identify areas of best practice and highlight areas for improvement to further enhance the scrutiny function. Additionally, this report may facilitate discussion on items which could be identified for inclusion within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Councillor Emlyn Schiavone and is made up of 14 Elected Members and 5 voting Co-opted Members (3 elected parent governor members, 1 representative from the Church in Wales and 1 representative from the Roman Catholic Church). Cabinet Members attend meetings as required in order to address the Committee on areas within their respective portfolios.

Support is provided by the Democratic Services Unit and other Council officers, as and when required.

2. Overview of the Work of the Committee in 2024/25

2.1 The Role of Scrutiny

Each Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the overview and scrutiny of specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective services. The Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of Cabinet's Education and Welsh Language portfolio and the respective service areas:-

Services from 3 - 19	Schools Safeguarding and Attendance Team
School Improvement, Organisation and Performance	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum
Educational Psychology	Adult Community Learning including Welsh for Adults

School Support and Governor Services	Youth Support Service
Nursery Education and Standards	School Admissions
Young People Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEETS)	Behavioural Services
Regional Consortia	School attendance
Carmarthenshire's School Investment Programme	Education data and systems
Inclusion (ALN)	Music Service
Development of the Welsh Language / Standards reporting	School Catering Services
Healthy Schools	Post 16 Education & Funding and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership
Estyn	

In accordance with its areas of responsibilities, the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee will seek to:-

- Examine how well the Cabinet and Council are performing;
- Hold the Cabinet to account and seek to promote open and transparent decision-making;
- Monitor the performance of the Council's services and functions;
- Review decisions made by the Cabinet where appropriate;
- Assist the Cabinet in the development, monitoring and review of policy;
- Scrutinise, as a key element of the consultation process, the proposed revenue budget strategy and capital investment programmes;
- Enable the participation of external organisations and partners in consideration of issues that may impact upon the delivery of Council and countywide priorities.

2.2 The Forward Work Plan

Scrutiny plays a key role in promoting accountability in the decision-making process of the Local Authority. It is also useful in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging partnership working with external agencies.

Scrutiny Committees operate a pre-decision method of scrutiny which enables the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee to take ownership of its Forward Work Plan and determine which reports from the Cabinet Forward Work Plan it wishes to consider. Scrutiny Committees may also identify their own topics, relevant to their remit, for review; furthermore, the Cabinet may invite relevant Scrutiny Committees to scrutinise a decision which was in the pipeline.

The Committee utilised the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny's Gateway framework to develop its Forward Work Plan for the 2024/25 municipal year which was reviewed on a regular basis. This provided a manageable, flexible, and robust approach to scrutiny and ensured that the areas for review were considered on a priority basis and in a timely manner.

In this regard, the Committee determined that periodic reports in relation to performance and budget monitoring be circulated to members outside the formal meeting programme. This process enabled any relevant matters identified by members to be placed on the formal agenda for further consideration, as appropriate. The benefits of such an approach led to an improved level of debate and input during Scrutiny Committee meetings. In the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the Forward Work Plan.

2.3 Meetings of the Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee

Meetings are scheduled periodically to consider issues and reports included in its Forward Work Plan. The Committee held 5 formal meetings during the 2024/25 municipal year and all meetings were conducted in accordance with the provisions set out within Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The meeting scheduled for April 2025 was cancelled, however the reports pertaining to Budget monitoring, Performance monitoring and Estyn updates proceeded to be circulated for consideration by email, with arrangements available for members to raise any issues at a formal meeting in line with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

To complement the work undertaken during formal meetings, the Committee may also undertake other scrutiny functions such as Task and Finish, One Day Scrutiny and visits to establishments falling within its remit, together with development sessions and workshops.

2.4 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

One of the principal roles of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee is to monitor the performance of services and functions within its remit. Accordingly, the Committee reviews performance monitoring reports and various strategies and plans to provide a balanced assessment of performance across the relevant service areas.

2.4.1 Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report 2023/24

In October 2024 the Committee received for consideration the Council's Annual Report 2023/24 on the Council's Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 which had been produced in accordance with the relevant provisions within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021. The report detailed the progress made with the Council's Well-being Objectives (WBO), together with the Council's self-assessment against the performance requirements of the previous financial year. The Committee focused upon the Service and Thematic priorities falling within its remit within the following Well-being Objectives:

- WBO 1:** Enabling our children and young people to have the best possible start in life (Start Well).
- WBO 2:** Enabling our residents to live and age well (Live & Age Well)
- WBO 3:** Enabling our communities and environment to be healthy, safe and prosperous (Prosperous Communities).

Outcome:

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 02 December 2024, took consideration of all feedback received and recommended to Council that the Annual Report 2023/24 be approved. The Council subsequently adopted the report at its meeting held on 11th December 2024.

2.4.2 2025/26 Business Plans

In January 2025 the Committee received for consideration the draft Business Plans relevant to the Education, Children and Family Services for 2025/26, as follows:-

- Education and Inclusion Services Plan
- School Effectiveness and Pupil Engagement Plan
- Welsh Language (within the People, Digital and Policy Plan)

These plans set out the strategic actions and measures to be implemented within each Division in order for the Council to progress with its well-being objectives, thematic priorities and service priorities. This provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider the priorities outlined for the Division and the review the proposed actions and measures for appropriateness in delivering against the Council's Corporate Strategy and maintaining the Council's key functions.

In considering the report the Committee acknowledged that the Council was channelling its resources to mitigate against the pressures faced by schools, however failure to continue in this regard would pose a significant risk to the Authority.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the Draft Business Plans relevant to the Education, Children and Family Services directorate for 2025/26.

2.4.3 10 Year Social Services Strategy

A request was made by the Committee to review the 10 year Social Services Strategy which aimed to provide a vision on how the Council would provide the statutory social services functions over the next decade. This report was initially planned to be received by Committee in October 2023 but was carried over to 2024/25 due to the strategy not being finalised. Upon development of the strategy, it was established that information pertaining to children's services was not included and was therefore not relevant to the Committee's remit. The report was subsequently removed from the Committee's Forward Work Plan.

2.4.4 2024/25 Performance Reports relevant to the Committee

In accordance with the protocols established by the Committee, quarterly performance monitoring reports relevant to the Committee's remit were circulated by email to members as follows:-

- June 2024 - Quarter 4 Performance Monitoring 2023/24
- October 2024 – Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring 2024/25
- January 2025 – Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring 2024/25
- April 2025 – Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring 2024/25

The information provided a self-evaluation of performance in accordance with the legislative framework enshrined within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Members were afforded the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration at the Committee's formal meeting, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

Outcome:-

The reports enabled members to monitor performance in respect of the Well-being Objectives relevant to the Committee's remit and aligned to the Authority's Corporate Strategy.

2.4.5 Strategic Focus Groups

The Committee considered a report in October 2024 which provided an update on the status of the Strategic Focus Groups (SFGs) which had previously been utilised as a mechanism to support the delivery of the Education, Children and Family Services business objectives.

The Committee was advised that the SFGs would no longer be continued due to changes in the management structure. Accordingly, an internal Managers Group had been established as a means of ensuring that the division's strategies and business planning arrangements are co-constructed, delivered and evaluated, in addition to providing a forum to resolve pressing and complex issues in schools and across the division.

The division intended to consult with headteachers on strategic matters at area meetings held every half term to enable input from all headteachers to be received rather than a representation of headteachers, with weekly updates by way of a newsletter being issued to schools. With the discontinuation of SFG updates, the Committee resolved that periodic reports summarising the discussions with Headteachers, including the actions and outcomes arising from those meetings, to be submitted to the Committee.

Outcome:-

The Committee received its first Headteacher Group update in May 2025. Members were appraised of the pertinent issues considered at the meetings within the areas of school management, education policy, and local authority initiatives. The meetings provided a vital platform for school leaders to discuss challenges and work collaboratively to find solutions and share best practices.

2.4.6 Update on Estyn Report Publications

Correspondence detailing the latest relevant Estyn report publications was circulated to the Committee by email in June 2024, October 2024, December 2024, January 2025, April 2025 and May 2025 in respect of its inspection and thematic reports pertaining to education and training.

Outcome:-

The reports appraised the Committee to of developments/emerging issues and provided an opportunity for members to raise any matters for further consideration.

2.4.7 Actions and Referrals

During the course of the municipal year, requests for additional items were made by members of the Committee to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role. Biannual updates on Actions and Referrals were presented to the Committee at its meetings held in June 2024, December 2024 and May 2025 which detailed the progress made in relation to these requests.

2.5 Revenue & Capital Budgets

2.5.1 Budget Monitoring Reports

In accordance with the protocols established by the Committee, quarterly reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets were provided to members as follows:-

- October 2024 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 30th June 2024;
- December 2024 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st August 2024.
- January 2025 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st October 2024
- April 2025 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st December 2024 and
- May 2025 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st February 2025.

The budget monitoring reports for October 2024, December 2024, and April 2025 were circulated to the Committee by email to afford Members the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration at the Committee's formal meeting, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules. The budget monitoring reports for January 2025 and May 2025 were considered as part of the formal agenda and enabled members to monitor expenditure in each service area and the progress made in connection with any capital works.

2.5.2 Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2023/24

In addition to monitoring the current revenue and capital budgets, the Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2023/24 was considered by the Committee in October 2024 which provided the Committee with an end of year financial position. The summary position showed that the Education, Children and Family Services division reported a £1,264k underspend against its approved budget which, in the main, was attributable to the application of grant funding and staffing vacancies. The underspend was reduced by the

cost of maintaining closed school sites and pressures on the free school breakfast and lunch provision.

2.5.3 Revenue Budget Strategy 2025/26 to 2027/28

At its meeting in January 2025 the Committee was consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2025/26 to 2027/28. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2025/26, together with indicative figures for the 2026/2027 and 2027/28 financial years.

In considering the situation regarding schools' delegated budgets, the Committee was appraised of the Authority's ongoing actions to mitigate the budgetary overspend, however the forecast over expenditure remained at a critical level across a large number of schools within the county and had potential to destabilise the Authority's wider finances. It was therefore considered highly unlikely that a further budget reduction would in fact be delivered/deliverable at this stage. Accordingly, it was agreed that the reduction be met through increased council tax, equating to approximately 3.5%, in order to prevent the situation getting worse whilst urgent action was undertaken to bring expenditure back in line with current resources.

The Committee expressed concern and dissatisfaction that the cumulative deficit balances remained a significant risk to the Authority, however there was little room for manoeuvre in light of the funding allocation from Welsh Government and UK Government.

Outcome:

As part of the Authority's widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2025/26 to 2027/28, the Committee considered the Strategy and endorsed the budget proposals, as submitted. The Budget Strategy was subsequently adopted by the Council at its meeting in February 2025, subject to some amendments.

2.5.4 School Budgets and Welsh Government Funding Streams for Education Services

In October 2024 the Committee received an update on the financial position of Nursery, Primary, Secondary, and Special Schools, including information on Welsh Government funding streams for education services.

The Committee reviewed the financial analysis of school balances, costs, and forecasts for 2024-2025, including data on balance brought forward, funding, over/underspend, and forecast balances, which provided an insight into the financial management and planning effectiveness of schools. The report highlighted a forecasted overspend of £10.8m at the that point in time, which equated to a net deficit on school reserves exceeding £5m by March 2025, which was deemed alarming and unsustainable. Representations had been conveyed by the Directors of Education across Wales to the Cabinet Secretary for Education at Welsh Government emphasising the severe financial

pressures on schools whereby the level of debt had tripled as a result of the financial burden placed upon them.

Furthermore, at its meeting in December 2024, the Committee considered a referral from the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee to look at the broader issue of school delegated budgets. The Committee raised significant concerns regarding the current trajectory in respect of the overall financial position of schools and acknowledged the challenges faced in maintaining high standards of education whilst balancing budgets.

Outcome:-

The Committee was appraised of the main financial pressures faced by schools, which were, in the main, attributable to staffing costs. It was also recognised that school budgets were determined in accordance with the general funding formula for schools and based upon pupil numbers. A synopsis of the ongoing support mechanisms offered to schools was also provided to the Committee.

In February 2025 the Committee received an awareness session which outlined the process and current situation in respect of the support mechanisms and monitoring arrangements within the Authority to assist schools in managing their budgets (section 3.3 refers).

The Committee requested a further update on school budgets to be presented for consideration as part of its Forward Work Plan for 2025/26.

2.6 Education

2.6.1 Additional Learning Needs Update

In June 2024 the Committee received for consideration an update on the Authority's implementation of the provisions enshrined within the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, which aimed to transform the expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The report detailed the Authority's progress to date, areas of best practice, areas for improvement and the future developments required to support ongoing reform. The Committee was advised that the Authority was on target to transfer all children to the new ALN system by the end of the 2024/2025 academic year.

The Committee thereupon received a presentation which detailed the experiences of Ysgol Y Bedol, Ysgol Peniel and Ysgol St. John Lloyds in embedding the ALN system within their respective schools.

In considering the challenges for the implementation of ALN it was noted that the main areas centred upon staffing capacity, consistency in ALN identification, funding and resource allocation, quality assurance of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), multi-

agency collaboration and engagement with non-maintained settings and meeting post-16 learner responsibilities.

The Committee was informed that complexities in respect of health and multi-agency collaboration centred upon referrals from social services, establishing responsibility for funding and dealing with differing protocols for cross-border agencies. The Committee expressed concerns regarding the unacceptable NHS delays in children receiving autism and ADHD assessments but were encouraged to note that support was available to all pupils with additional learning needs, regardless of formal medical diagnosis.

Outcome:-

The Committee resolved to incorporate a workshop on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Transformation into the 2024/25 Forward Work Plan. A workshop was subsequently arranged for Spring 2025, however due to no further updates being available to the Committee, it was agreed that this be delayed and will be considered as part of the 2025/26 Forward Work Plan.

2.6.2 Modernising in Education Programme Strategy

The Committee considered the Authority's draft MEP Strategy in June 2024 which had been developed to direct the future delivery of the new Modernising Education Programme. The draft strategy was guided by a set of strategic aims and underpinned by the principle of a holistic approach and the requirement to enhance and support a range of national, corporate and educational objectives. Furthermore, the draft strategy detailed the viability and investment criteria required to ensure an appropriate and transparent method of developing school organisation and investment proposals.

Officers addressed a range of queries and observations which related to the quality of existing school buildings, the capital programme for school repairs and maintenance, utilisation of school facilities for community use and the Welsh Government guidelines in respect of the design of new school buildings. Suggestions were also put forth in respect of the wording within the Primary Education Principles section.

Reference was made to the significant financial pressures within the Education and Children capital programme whereby it was explained that school repairs and maintenance were prioritised according to areas of greatest needs; it was however acknowledged that the available budget was insufficient to meet the needs of schools.

The Committee gained an insight into the development of an MEP strategy that would enable an education system which was reflective of the geographical nature of the county and which provided learning environments fit for teaching and learning in the 21st Century.

Outcome:

The Committee gained an insight into the development of an MEP strategy which endeavoured to implement an education system which was reflective of the geographical nature of the county and which provided learning environments fit for teaching and learning in the 21st Century.

In November 2024, following consideration of the Committee's observations, along with the feedback provided as part of the public consultation process, the Cabinet approved the draft Modernising Education Programme Strategy. Regular updates on the implementation of the MEP will be considered by the Committee going forward.

2.6.3 Progress Update on Estyn Inspection Recommendations

At its meeting in December 2024, the Committee received for consideration a report which outlined the progress made with the recommendations provided by Estyn following their inspection of education services in Carmarthenshire in July 2023. The recommendations centred upon improving pupils' attendance in the authority's schools, strengthening school improvement processes and refining approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning.

The Committee was appraised of the attendance figures for primary and secondary schools and received a synopsis of the array of initiatives and campaigns which aimed to ensure a strengthened approach and ownership of attendance improvement over time. The Committee endorsed the holistic approach undertaken by the Authority to address the pastoral and individual wellbeing needs of pupils which would, in turn, positively impact upon attendance levels in the long-term. In acknowledging that the challenges of school attendance was reflective of the national situation, the Committee welcomed the £8.8m Welsh Government funding to improve attendance levels

In respect of strengthening school improvement processes the Committee considered the comprehensive school improvement strategy which had been communicated to all team members and focused upon strengthening pupil progress and engagement and the professional development of newly qualified teachers, teaching assistants, and future leaders. The school improvement processes involved regular, accurate self-evaluation and monitoring professional learning and enabled leaders to know their schools better, which was reflected in fewer schools receiving a recommendation of self-evaluation and monitoring from Estyn. Furthermore, school to school collaboration, cluster working and effective practice sharing events further enhanced school improvement processes.

To address the recommendation pertaining to self-evaluation and improvement planning, the Committee considered the measures which had been implemented to enable issues of concern to be identified early through improved use of evidence and data, utilisation of a risk rated system to prioritise issues for improvement and enhanced utilisation of the Performance and Improvement Monitoring System to critically review information against set criteria.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the measures implemented to date and will consider further updates going forward to support the Authority in addressing the Estyn Recommendations.

2.6.4 Adult Community Learning

The Committee, at its meeting in December 2024, considered a report on Adult Learning in the Community which outlined the collaborative arrangements between various stakeholders to deliver Essential Skills and English to eligible post-16 learners across multiple centres in the county.

The Committee received an overview of the funding mechanisms for Adult Learning in the Community and noted the successful implementation of the Multiply Project, a UK government initiative aimed at improving the numeracy skills of adults.

The Committee reviewed the benefits, areas for improvement and the future development plans for the service, whereby members welcomed the endeavours to expand the provision to reach more adults in the community, particularly hard-to-reach groups.

Outcome:

The Committee gained a valuable insight of the importance of the Adult Learning services provision within the County.

In view of the cessation of the Multiply Project in 2025 the Committee endorsed the ongoing work to implement an exit and legacy strategy to engage with learner groups in order to offer opportunities to transfer into Adult Community Learning and continue the work that the Multiply Project had started in schools.

2.6.5 Update on the Welsh For Adults Provision

During the reporting period the Committee received two updates to monitor progress in respect of the Welsh for Adults provision. In December 2024, the Committee received a report which provided an update on the current position regarding the Welsh for Adults provision for Carmarthenshire. The Committee was advised that the service was provided through the National Centre for Learning Welsh, based in Aberystwyth, since 1st September 2024. The report outlined the array of 'Learn Welsh' courses offered at different levels from beginners to experienced speakers, together with the current enrolment numbers.

The Committee was scheduled to receive a further update on the transition of the Welsh for Adults provision from Carmarthenshire County Council to the National Centre for Learning Welsh at its meeting in May 2025, however the report was delayed.

Outcome:

The Committee will consider a further report as part of the 2025/26 Forward Work Plan.

2.6.6 Update on the Post-16 Provision in Carmarthenshire

In December 2024, and subsequent to the Post-16 review workshop and progress update received during 2022/23, the Committee received for consideration a report which provided an update on the national context of the Medr commissioning body for Post-16 Educational Provision.

The Committee was informed that schools were actively developing their Post-16 provision and learner outcomes through increased collaboration and learner engagement. The Committee reviewed the advantages and challenges of collaborative teaching approaches and were appraised of the current and planned collaborations, together with the endeavours to ensure an equitable provision for all pupils, including those with additional learning needs. The next steps included strengthening strategic coordination of Post 16 courses, enhancing Welsh language provision and developing links with external partnerships.

In view of the lack of availability of public transportation, together with increased transportation costs, the Committee expressed their support for a hybrid learning provision going forward and recommended that opportunities be explored with the Dolen Teifi non-profit making organisation which aimed to provide affordable and accessible transport to individuals, organisations, and groups within the counties of Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion. Furthermore, the Committee emphasised the need for an integrated policy, by way of collaboration between schools and colleges, could benefit post-16 learners across the county, and particularly those in rural areas. The Committee endorsed the representations being made to lobby Welsh Government for improved public transport.

Outcome:

The comments and observations made by the Committee were noted by the Cabinet Member and Officers and were used to refine the Post-16 Review.

2.6.7 Elective Home Education in Carmarthenshire

At its meeting in May 2025 the Committee considered a report on Elective Home Education in Carmarthenshire. The report included information on:

- The Authority's obligations
- Maintaining a register
- Safeguarding
- Intervention
- Flexi-schooling
- Funding

Outcome:

The report highlighted the importance of collaboration between schools, Elective Home Education advisors responsible for supporting Elective Home Education learners and families.

The comments and observations made by the Committee were noted by the Cabinet Member and Officers and a further update be provided in due course.

3 Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task & Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task and Finish review during 2024/25.

3.2 Site Visits

During the reporting period the Committee undertook the following Site Visits:

- Five Roads Primary School
- Bancffosfelen Primary School

The visits provided the Committee with an insight into the impact of the learning environment upon the development of pupils.

Outcome:

Further Site Visits will be held in 2025/26 which will facilitate the Committee in its consideration of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP).

3.3 Development Sessions

During the 2024/25 municipal year, Committee Members were invited to the following development sessions/seminars facilitated by the Authority:

Date	Development Session / Seminar
22/05/2024	Introduction to the Work of the Pembrokeshire & Carmarthenshire Coroner
14/06/2024	Introduction to the Learning Management System "Thinqi"
10/07/2024	Highway Surfacing and Maintenance
25/07/2024	Section 106 Agreements (Planning)
11/09/2024	Environmental Protection - Food Standards & Public Health
26/09/2024	Corporate Safeguarding
09/10/2024	Pentre Awel Update
21/10/2024	Transport for Wales Bus Franchising Briefing
29/10/2024 & 30/10/2024	Dementia Friends Awareness training session
12/11/2024	Building Cyber Resilience: Safeguarding our Council's Digital Future
20/11/2024	Winter Preparedness
10/12/2024	WLGA Role & Key Responsibilities
11/12/2024	Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service - Chief Fire Officer Annual Update
29/01/2025	Nutrient Management - National Guidance and Challenges
05/02/2025	Regional Transport Plan
12/02/2025	Elected Officials - Personal Security Briefing
12/02/2025	One Planet Development Training Session
18/02/2025 & 24/02/2025	WLGA Scrutiny Self Assessment Workshop
09/04/2024	Regional Transport Plan Drop In Event
09/04/2024	"Thinqi" Learning Management System Drop in Session
07/05/2025	Refresher Training on the Members Code of Conduct

In addition to the above Corporate Development sessions / seminars, the Committee also held the following bespoke sessions:

Date	Development Session / Workshop
06/01/2025	<p><u>Effectiveness of School Governing Bodies</u></p> <p>The development session considered the effectiveness of school governing bodies within the context of:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Obligations and Core Responsibilities • Main Functions and Requirements of the Role • Training Requirements and Opportunities • Best Practice and Challenges • Role of the Local Authority • Recruitment and Retention <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <p>The verbal feedback provided to Officers at the workshop assisted in shaping the guidance and processes adopted by the Local Authority, within the confines of legislative requirements, to enhance the effectiveness of school governing bodies.</p>
13/02/2025	<p><u>Delegated School Budgets</u></p> <p>The development session provided an outline of the process and current situation in respect of the support mechanisms and monitoring arrangements within the Authority to assist schools in managing their budgets. The Committee considered the rationale and process for the school visits, and the ongoing work to evaluate current budget practices, review and adjust budgets, implement monitoring mechanisms and the key themes arising from the recommendations made.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <p>The development session provided the Committee with an insight into the ongoing work by way of a consultant headteacher providing support, advice and challenge tailored to individual schools.</p> <p>In light of the concerns raised in respect of the level of deficits within delegated school budgets the Committee emphasised that fundamental changes were required to address the situation going forward. The Committee will monitor the situation by way of further updates as part of the 2025/26 Forward Work Plan.</p>
10/03/25	<p><u>Behaviour Support Services: Promoting Positive Behaviour</u></p> <p>The development session provided an overview of behaviour support services within the county within the context of the Four Phase Model: Phase 1: Mainstream Schools Phase 2: Mainstream Schools Phase 3: Specialist Settings (BESD) Phase 4: Developments</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <p>The Committee gained an insight into the prevalence of behavioural issues across schools and gained an awareness of the range of programmes of support in place for learners using the ethos of inclusive</p>

4. Impact

4.1 How has Scrutiny Made a Difference This Year?

The majority of decisions made by the Authority are made by the Cabinet. Scrutiny offers the other 65 non-executive Councillors an opportunity to influence those decisions and act as a “critical friend”. Pre-decision Scrutiny is particularly influential in this regard as it affords Scrutiny Committees the opportunity to consider and comment upon policies and emerging issues before they are considered by Cabinet and this is the voice of the people. Scrutiny also assists in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies.

The Education, Young People and Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee endeavours to undertake meaningful work which contribute towards policies, decision making and improved services for the people and children of Carmarthenshire. The scrutiny function has also played an important role in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies. The involvement of key stakeholders, including local residents, community organisations and partners are an important part of the scrutiny process and Councillors are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents.

During the 2024/25 municipal year, the Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee has made a positive impact in many ways, including:-

- Supporting the Authority in its endeavours to improve the budgetary position of schools by way of overseeing the evaluation of the current budget practices, identification of best practice and the implementation of monitoring mechanisms going forward.
- Reviewing the Authority’s arrangements and ambitious priorities to ensure that the children, young people and learners of all ages within Carmarthenshire are happy, safe, and thriving, and fulfilling their personal, social and learning potential.
- Shaping the development of Strategies such as the Modernising Education Programme (MEP).
- Highlighting improvement opportunities in service delivery, including contributing to the Post-16 Review to inform the Authority’s policy going forward.
- Raising public awareness of key Council services – including what’s working well, and where improvements are required.
- Providing an arena for decision-makers, stakeholder and public collaboration.
- Undertaking its gatekeeping role to ensure that the budgetary and performance issues within its remit are being addressed and managed effectively.

- Holding Cabinet Members to account and provide constructive challenge and input into a range of policy and service issues.

5. Public Engagement

The Scrutiny function provides the opportunity for public participation in the Authority's activities whereby members of the public can request items to be placed on the Committee's meeting agenda. Carmarthenshire residents, or those who own a business or are employed within the county are also permitted to ask questions at meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Whilst the Committee did not receive any suggestions of possible topics from members of the public during the reporting period, the Committee's Forward Work Plan included a range of topics which required public consultation/participation.

In order to promote public awareness of Scrutiny Committees and the ability of the public to put forward topics for discussion, the Forward Work Plans of the Authority's Scrutiny Committees and details of how the public can become involved, are published on the Authority's website:-

<https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/committees-meetings/scrutiny/#.Xp7Am6aQxMs>

During the municipal year, the Authority's Communications division provided digital marketing support to the Scrutiny function and proactively promoted details of forthcoming items which may be of interest to the public in an attempt to raise public awareness and participation. The public are invited, via a number of different avenues, to get involved in the Scrutiny process and to highlight any issues of concern.

6. Challenges

The Education, Children and Family Services division continued to be under pressure throughout the municipal year as a result of budgetary constraints and the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, the department has adapted and developed solutions to meet the needs of children and young people across Carmarthenshire. It has been a balancing act for the Committee in undertaking its scrutiny duty without impacting on the resourcing of front-line services.

During the reporting period, some items were not reported in line with the Forward Work Plan set by the Committee. This has highlighted the need for the timing of scrutiny activity to be reviewed in conjunction with Officers to ensure topics are being discussed at the right time to enable meaningful discussion, engagement and maximum impact and value.

The time lapse in receiving financial reports has also been identified as a challenge where it has been identified that the timeliness of financial monitoring information would better support effective scrutiny and better co-ordination with Cabinet reporting.

Making sure Councillors are clear about the demands of any Scrutiny activity to help them consider their involvement and ensure they can give their time to it, balancing other

demands. In this regard, it is recognised that the rescheduling of meeting dates, once set, should be avoided unless necessary.

7. Future Work

The Committee utilise the principles of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in order to achieve a streamlined and focused scrutiny process. The work of the Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year was considered by the Committee at a Forward Work Planning session on 29 April 2025 and will be regularly reviewed as part of the monitoring of the Forward Work Plan during the course of the year.

The Committee will continue to concentrate on topics where members' input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. Furthermore, in order to enhance the Authority's Scrutiny function, members will continue to attend development sessions, seek officers' advice where appropriate and make full use of informal pre-meeting discussion. Some of the focus areas for the Committee during the forthcoming municipal period include:

- Understanding the continued pressures faced by all services under its terms of reference; and the impact of the introduction of new/additional legislation affecting services and wider partners.
- Continuing to monitor Recovery in Schools, particularly in relation to budgets, attendance and attainment, behaviour, mental health and well-being across services and beyond.
- Implementation of the Modernising Education Programme.
- Continuing to look at the impact of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform on Schools, including ensuring that capacity can meet demand in this area.
- Monitoring performance, particularly capacity and demand for services and quality assurance processes.

8. Support for the Scrutiny Function

Support for Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny function is provided by the Democratic Services Unit, based within the Administration and Law Division of the Chief Executive's Department. Support for the scrutiny function includes:-

- formulating and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings in accordance with the Forward Work Plans;
- providing support and constitutional advice to the Scrutiny Committees and to members of those Committees as well as producing minutes of their meetings and ensuring any issues arising from those meetings are actioned;
- giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to members of the Council and its officers;
- managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire by engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny with the Cabinet;

- advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, as and when guidance is published;
- managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Plans in conjunction with Scrutiny Committee members;
- managing and co-ordinating Scrutiny review work, including the administration of scrutiny Task and Finish Groups, assisting in writing reports in conjunction with the Groups and assisting in the implementation and monitoring of completed reviews.
- assisting with the Scrutiny Member Development Programme.

For more information on Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire including Forward Work Plans, Task & Finish reports and Annual Reports, please visit the County Council's website at: www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/scrutiny.

To contact the Democratic Services Unit, please call 01267 224028 or e-mail scrutiny@carmarthenshire.gov.uk.

9. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of five formal meetings were held during the reporting period. It should be noted that Committee Members are also invited to attend development sessions, workshops and site visits throughout the municipal year.

Scrutiny Committee Member	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Sue Allen	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Liam Bowen	1 [of 5]	20%
Cllr. Kim Broom	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Lewis Davies	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Betsan Jones	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Carys Jones*	1 [of 1]	100%
Cllr. Dot Jones	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Hefin Jones	4 [of 5]	80%
Cllr. Jean Lewis	5 [of 5]	100%
Cllr. Sean Rees*	1 [of 1]	100%
Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone*	4 [of 4]	100%
Cllr. Edward Skinner	3 [of 5]	60%
Cllr. Janet Williams	5 [of 5]	100%

Cllr. Steve Williams*	4 [of 4]	100%
Vacancy	N/A	N/A
Parent Governor Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Mr Anthony Enoch	5 [of 5]	100%
Deborah Elias*	3 [of 3]	100%
Vacancy	N/A	N/A
Church Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Ms Mari Hughes	4 [of 5]	80%
Mrs Vera Kenny	5 [of 5]	100%

Cabinet Member	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Glynog Davies (Education and the Welsh Language)	4 [of 5]	80%
Cllr. Alun Lenny (Resources)	4 [of 4]	100%

***Notes:**

Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone replaced Cllr Carys Jones on 11.09.2024

Cllr. Steve Williams replaced Cllr Sean Rees on 11.09.2024

Ms. Deborah Elias appointed on 08.10.2024