

Learning, Skills and Economy Scrutiny Committee – 17th October, 2018

Scrutiny Briefing – Review of change of age of admission

Background

This paper has been produced in response to a request to Joint Chairs in November 2017 to review the change of age of admission which was confirmed at Cabinet on the 12th April 2016 which an implementation date of school years 2017/2018.

A copy of the background information provided to Joint Chairs is attached at Appendix A.

An extract of the Cabinet Minutes dated 12th April 2016 is attached at Appendix B

Joint Chairs agreed that this should be in the scrutiny work programme and that the review should take place one year after implementation of the change.

The aim of this session is to ascertain if the original intentions of the proposals were realised and if not what lessons can be learnt from the process. It will be important to separate what could reasonably have been known at the time of the decision and what is now known with the benefit of hindsight.

The second aim of this session is to understand what issues the service are facing in respect of pre-school provision both now and in the medium term future and what the service are intending to do to meet these challenges.

Submission to Joint Chairs for approval to add to scrutiny work programme prepared October 2017

Change of Admission Age For Pupils Starting School

1) With any major change it is vital that the systems developed to ensure the change happens as seamlessly as possible thus ensuring minimum costly disruption. In this specific case it would include: cost in staff time, redundancy costs, setting up costs, building adaption costs, sustainability costs. A review of the systems adopted should feed into any future planned changes within the educational field.

2) Finance - The projected savings have they in fact been made? What was the cost of the tender process itself including support to bidders, either directly by council officers or via contractor's / business support? Was this above/below/in line with expectations and budget? Has this process increased or decreased council liabilities for pensions and other staffing costs? If so by how much and was this in line/ above / below expectations?

How will cost savings from these changes be monitored over the course of the contract? How have all costs been accounted for e.g. additional business support time/costs, travel and subsistence etc... and are these costs included against these savings or assigned to another budget? Who is overseeing the management of these Nursery budgets?

3) Are there outstanding areas such as buildings or unused capacity that have budget implications moving forward now the proposed change has happened? Some settings are still awaiting crucial facilities.

4) Standards have to be monitored and maintained therefore there are resource implications for setting staff who have had the opportunity to undertake a short training to begin to understand the requirements for the older children that are now in settings but need more in depth training.

5) Governance - The governance of settings on school premises where the named responsible person is the head teacher have legal implications that need clarification. Governing Bodies have no authority over the setting (a decision by Powys/ CSSIW?) or the work that the head teacher is undertaking for the setting but the Governing Body have the responsibility for the school and the wellbeing of the head teacher. Is the work for the setting taking place wholly outside of the hours needed to run the school? What extra resources have had to be made available to support this? Have these costs, if any, been picked up and detailed against the cost of the programme? If something goes wrong in the setting that has implications for the school who takes responsibility and who pays? How many settings have transferred from council / school running to the private sector? and vice versa?

6) Management of the tender - as many new settings had applications rejected by CSSIW on the grounds of governance, and subsequently had to change their implementation/operational and service delivery plans, was the process in fact fair to all bidders? Communication was poor - the use of the portal to answer questions during the tender process was frequently undermined by childcare Business Support providing

different or contradictory information to bidders. Replies from officers were slow and compromised deadlines. HR - Inadequate HR support surrounding the TUPE transfer of staff caused serious concern. This process is ongoing, and still there are several HR issues, not least pay and conditions, hours etc Who is responsible for this?

7) Risks - what risks does the Council now hold for service delivery which we did not hold before this process began e.g. Additional costs, pension entitlements, inspections, standards and legal liabilities?

1.	OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CHANGE TO THE AGE OF ADMISSION IN TO PRIMARY SCHOOLS	C63- 2016
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Cabinet considered responses to the consultation on the proposal to raise the age of admission to primary schools for the 2017-18 school year from the start of the term in which a child has their 4th birthday to the start of the school year following a child's 4th birthday. This would bring the policy in line with the majority of Welsh authorities along with the neighbouring English authorities. It was further recommended that funded 3+ provision is extended from the current 2 terms to up to 5 terms of provision and that the funded hours are increased to 12.50 hours per week from the current 10.00 hours per week.

8 consultation meetings had been held and a total of 679 responses to an online questionnaire had been received, together with a further 43 paper responses. The majority of the responses were received from parents of current or prospective primary aged pupils. The responses showed that 80% of the respondents were against the proposed change to the age of admission, with 16% of the respondents being in favour of the Council's proposal and 4% with no strong view either way.

The report addressed the four main issues that had been raised in the consultation process:

1. The impact that the change would have on the educational outcomes and progression of Nursery aged children prior to their admission to school at the start of the Reception year.
2. The availability of adequate places in the enhanced 3+ provision for all entitled children.
3. The number of hours of pre-school provision offered and funded by the Authority
4. The impact the proposal will have on parental childcare costs with children having a delay in commencing full time school provision of up to 3 terms.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and officers answered questions from the Chair of the People Scrutiny Committee and political group leaders. It was confirmed that there would be continuity of provision for those children accessing Flying Start at 12½ hours a week. The Chair of the People Scrutiny noted that flexible provision could mitigate the impact on childcare but that this had not been considered in the report. Officers advised that there would be opportunities to consider flexible provision when services were recommissioned.

The impact on school budgets was approximately £3,200 per child which, for the school with the largest number of children affected, would amount to £135,000. Officers confirmed that the proposals would result in a funding reduction of £2.7m equivalent to 60 teaching posts. Any redundancy costs would be funded centrally. The Portfolio Holder for Finance noted that the estimated saving resulting from the proposals was £1,226,000 in a full year. The Medium Term Financial Strategy had required £1.5m savings and he asked that the Schools service come forward with proposals on how to make up the shortfall.

County Councillor William Powell spoke against the recommendations citing the findings of the consultation and parents' concerns over childcare and education standards. He asked the Cabinet to defer a decision for 12 months to give families time to make alternative provision. Responding to the point made about standards, it was explained that the impact on standards had not been assessed as significant. The Head of Schools confirmed that each setting had teacher support and each was subject to inspection by Estyn.

Cabinet noted the comments made but also noted the need to deliver services within the budget set by Council and for all services to contribute to the savings target.

RESOLVED	Reason for Decisions:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Authority as the admission authority for Community and Church Controlled Primary Schools approve that the age of admission to Primary Schools be amended to the start of the school year following a child's fourth birthday for the 2017-18 Admissions Year and future years. 2. That the level of funded 3+ pre-school provision is increased from 10 hours per week to 12.50 hours per week from the start of the 2017-18 School Year. 3. That officers bring forward proposals for implementing changes to the primary school Fair Funding Formula arrangements in respect of the above change for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 and future years. 4. That the Council undertakes a tender process for the recommissioning of the extended 3+ provision. 5. That officers undertake any required consultation under the School Organisation Code in respect of pre-school and primary school provision following the recommissioning of the extended 3+ provision. 6. That further work is undertaken with the schools in the Llanfyllin Catchment area, Llanelwedd C in W School and Llangattock C in W School to identify the proposed actions required to meet the Authority's responsibility in respect to pre-school provision, 	<p>To confirm admission arrangements into primary schools for the 2017-18 school year by 15th April 2016 as required under the Admission Code of Practice arrangements.</p> <p>To provide and commission an extended sustainable network of pre-school settings.</p> <p>To provide funding arrangements for 2017-18 and 2018-19 to reflect the admission arrangements.</p> <p>To register the provision provided through schools and maintained settings correctly.</p> <p>To allow all children to have access to a funded 3+ pre-school place</p>

<p>together with any required capital investment requirements.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. That the Authority undertakes further work to identify and develop the required places for the delivery of 3+ provision in the identified areas. 8. That officers monitor the proposals for funded childcare provision following the outcome of the Welsh Government elections in May. 9. That Cabinet approve the Senior Manager – Central Services as the Project Sponsor to the project. 10. That a detailed project plan be developed and presented by the Project Sponsor to the Transforming Learning Programme Board. 11. That the Council approve the recruitment of a Project Manager on a fixed term contract to 31st December 2017 to support and lead the re-commissioning of extended 3+ provision and to support schools in reducing staffing levels as a result of the reduction in funding. The post to be funded through the management of change budget at a cost of approximately £39,000 (pending Job Evaluation) 12. That settings which propose to have 2 year olds in the same setting as 3 and 4 year olds are required to submit a business case on how they will meet the required educational outcomes. 	<p>To ensure that the project is managed and reported through the Authority's Transforming Learning Programme Board.</p> <p>To maintain education progression and standards.</p>
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