

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 3rd December, 2018

Report of the Cabinet Member for Learning and Culture

Children, Young People and Education Committee Inquiry into School Funding in Wales

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Cabinet of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's call for evidence to inform its forthcoming inquiry into school funding and to seek delegated authority to submit a written response on behalf of the Council.

Recommendations

1. THAT Cabinet note the focus areas for the inquiry and authorise the Director of Learning and Skills in consultation with the Managing Director, Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Learning and Culture to submit written evidence on behalf of the Council.

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To ensure the Children, Young People and Education Committee is made aware of the issues the Council has previously raised with Welsh Government over the sufficiency and allocation of funding for education and schools in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Background

2. The Children, Young People and Education Committee of the National Assembly for Wales is undertaking an inquiry into School Funding. Its call for written evidence was launched on 13 October 2018 and runs until 14 December 2018.
3. The inquiry covers the sufficiency of school funding in Wales and the way school budgets are determined and allocated. The inquiry will focus specifically on:
 - the sufficiency of provision for school budgets in the context of other public service budgets and available resources;
 - the extent to which the level of provision for school budgets complements or inhibits delivery of the Welsh Government's policy objectives;
 - the relationship, balance and transparency between various sources of schools' funding including core budgets and hypothecated funding;

- the local government funding formula and the weighting given to education and school budgets specifically within the Local Government Settlement;
- Welsh Government oversight of how Local Authorities set individual schools' budgets including for example, the weighting given to factors such as the age profile of pupils, deprivation, language of provision, number of pupils with Additional Learning Needs and pre-compulsory age provision;
- progress and developments since previous Assembly Committees' reviews (for example the Enterprise and Learning Committee in the Third Assembly); and
- the availability and use of comparisons between education funding and school budgets in Wales and other UK nations.

Relevant Issues and Options

4. Members will be aware that the level of funding the Vale of Glamorgan Council receives for Education Services has been highlighted frequently in recent years. At £5,107, the 2018/19 gross funding per pupil is £568 below the Wales average of £5,675, this is in spite of the Council funding Education at £3 million above the Indicator Based Assessment.
5. The Council has worked closely with the Vale of Glamorgan Schools Budget Forum in order to understand the disparity in funding across Wales. Clarification has been sought about the formula used by Welsh Government to generate the Indicator Based Assessment for Education. Correspondence with a number of Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries over the past 4 years and recent meetings with local AM's and MP's has failed to identify the factors which result in the guide line cost of educating a pupil in the Vale of Glamorgan being substantially less than the rest of Wales.
6. Welsh Government has confirmed that the formula is underpinned by four principles; equity, stability; clarity and relevance. However, it has acknowledged that sparsity is based on data in the 1991 Census, the special education formula was last updated in 2006 and the primary and secondary formulae in 2003. Welsh Government has been reluctant to commission a full independent review of the Local Government Standard Spending Assessment formula, placing the responsibility for driving such a review with the 22 local authorities. Specific comments from Cabinet Secretaries in relation to the issues we have raised as a Council include:
 - "We expect local authorities to deliver our shared aim of high quality education for every child and set budgets at a level which gives every school the resources needed to reflect this priority."
 - "Spending per pupil reflects the spending decisions that the Council has taken in setting its budgets for schools as part of the overall budget decisions made by the Authority."
7. Clearly, this fails to acknowledge responsibility for the overall quantum of funding allocated to local government for Education and the subsequent distribution of that funding to individual local authorities.
8. The Council has also written to both the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Education about the withdrawal of grant funding for support services for Ethnic Minority and Gypsy Traveller and Roma pupils. The decision was ill-judged, ill-thought out, and failed to take into account the current Government's priorities. For example: 'Prosperity for All; the National Strategy' sets out the Government's vision for Wales as a vibrant, tolerant and welcoming place to live and work, a country

which is outward looking and where people of all backgrounds are respected and valued. It states a commitment to continue to work to counter discrimination and ensure opportunities for all. This funding has been partially restored in 2018/19 (the Council received £180k compared to £240k in the previous year) and a commitment has been made to providing the same amount across Wales in 2019/20. However, no commitment has been made to the continuation of this funding beyond 2019/20.

9. The WLGA on behalf of local government has lobbied consistently for a reduction in the hypothecation of funding, requesting that grants be transferred to the Revenue Settlement. Education has seen an increase in grants in recent years for the delivery of policy initiatives which has coincided with a reduction in the core funding for Education and Schools transferred to local authorities through the revenue settlement. These grants create additional bureaucracy and remove local authority and schools' flexibility to improve outcomes for all pupils. The additional £15 million Education funding recently announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Education will once again be in the form of a grant for staff in schools to access professional development. This comes at a time when schools are facing unprecedented financial pressures and will inevitably be facing staff redundancies in order to balance their budgets.
10. The Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into school funding is very timely given both the national position on Education funding and the comparatively disadvantaged position of schools and pupils in the Vale of Glamorgan. The issues outlined above will be expanded upon in the Council's response.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

11. There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

12. Continued cuts to funding for Education Services through the Revenue Support Grant and further hypothecation of funding for specific purposes has led to core funding for schools and education support services being reduced to unacceptable levels which will inevitably impact on the Council's ability to sustain current services.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

13. There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

Crime and Disorder Implications

14. There are no crime or disorder implications arising from this report.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

15. Sufficient and effective allocation of funding for education is required to enable the delivery of education services that meet the needs of all children and young people including those with a protected characteristic.

Corporate/Service Objectives

16. Funding allocated to education contributes to a wide range of Corporate/Service Objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan.

Policy Framework and Budget

17. This is a matter for Executive decision by the Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

18. Not applicable.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

19. Learning and Culture and Corporate Performance and Resources.

Background Papers

None

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Officers Consulted

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Responsible Officer:

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