

EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 15/04/21

Present: Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Chair)
Councillor Elwyn Jones (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Steve Collings, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Selwyn Griffiths, Judith Humphreys, Gareth Tudor Morris Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Rheinallt Puw, Dewi Roberts, Elfed Powell Roberts and Mair Rowlands.

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church) and Manon Williams (Arfon Parent/Governor Representative).

Officers present: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Adviser) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5:

(*Education Department*)
Councillor Celyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education)
Garem Jackson (Head of Education)
Ffion Edwards Ellis (Assistant Head of ALN and Inclusion)
Ellen Rowlands (TRAC Manager)

(*Children and Supporting Families Department*)
Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Catrin Thomas (Assistant Head of Supporting Families)
Bethan Eluned Jones (16-24 Support Team Leader)

Present for item 6:

Councillor Gareth Thomas (Cabinet Member – Economy and Community)
Nia Gruffydd (Libraries Service Manager)
Roland Evans (Assistant Head of Culture)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Freya Bentham, Ruth Roe (Meirionnydd Parent/Governor Representative), Karen Vaughan Jones (Dwyfor Parent/Governor Representative), Dilwyn Ellis Hughes (UCAC) and Dylan Huw Jones (NASUWT).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Selwyn Griffiths declared a personal interest in item 5 on the agenda - Delivering the Youth Engagement and Development Framework in Gwynedd - as his daughter-in-law was responsible for submitting the report and as he had a family connection with the Wavehill company who had drawn-up the TRAC and ADTRAC evaluation report.
The member was not of the opinion that they were prejudicial interests, and he did not withdraw from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 4 February 2021 as a true record.

5. DELIVERING THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK IN GWYNEDD

The Cabinet Member for Education and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, along with officials from the Education Department and the Children and Supporting Families Department were welcomed to the meeting.

Presented - the report of the Cabinet Member for Education inviting the scrutiny committee to consider whether the Council's arrangements and provisions are sufficient to support young people who are at risk of disengaging from education or who have disengaged from education, training or employment.

The two Cabinet Members set out the context noting that:

- The Youth Engagement and Development Framework, introduced by the Welsh Government in 2013, was a cross-departmental responsibility.
- The views of the scrutinisers be sought on the arrangements for meeting the requirements of the Framework following the cessation of European Social Fund (ESF) funding for TRAC and ADTRAC projects.
- Everyone needed to constantly remind themselves during the discussion that this was a framework report, i.e. the framework for how the Council supports children and young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and make observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:

- Going forward, it was important to understand the successes and failures of the current provision.
- It was felt that the committee was scrutinising this issue too soon, or too late. The Framework itself was eight years old. Although the framework arrangements had been in place since then, some of the provisions attached to it had changed. Some of the provisions were under review. To date, the Wavehill review of TRAC and ADTRAC had identified the need for this type of support for young people, and their success was evident in the review up to a certain point, but things had changed since then, especially as a result of the pandemic context. There was also a desire to continue with these provisions, but their funding was ceasing. ADTRAC funding ended next month, and TRAC funding ended in a year. Discussions on sources of funding beyond the current European Funds were being led by the Westminster Government, but how could it proceed, unless there was a very significant change of mind on the part of the powers who fund these things?
- Collaboration was particularly important in the current difficult situation as a result of the loss of ESF funding, and multi-agency collaboration in Dyffryn Nantlle was cited as a good example of thinking outside the box.
- One of the biggest influences on young people is their peers, and it was assumed that there were young people, who were once difficult and vulnerable, but who had now turned a corner and moved on to further education, training or employment, and who were willing to talk openly to disaffected young people.
- It should be asked whether there is evidence that the decision to charge for transport to Coleg Meirion Dwyfor had been a barrier to young people attending further education.

In response to the observations and questions from members:

- Details were provided of the collaboration between the CAMHS mental health service within ADTRAC, and between the TRAC project and the ALN and Inclusion Service and the School Counselling Service.
- In terms of measuring how many young people were in employment by the age of 25, it was explained that the Service measured the outputs, or the journey of young people who engage with the programmes and provisions. In terms of ADTRAC, an infographic was provided outlining how many young people were receiving support, and had moved into education, training or employment. Of the number of young people receiving the support, 77% progressed to a successful outcome. The Service also captured the soft, more positive outcomes that the young people received.
- With regard to the lessons learnt in terms of which interventions were successful or not, it was explained that the final evaluation of ADTRAC and TRAC would outline the most successful interventions, so that they could be incorporated into core services in the future, once European funds had ceased.
- It was explained that Covid had not affected the tracking systems for young people, as the multi-agency collaboration had been brought closer together as a result of Covid. However, it had impacted on the ability to successfully engage with young people who were NEET, because face-to-face work had to end during the lockdown periods.
- In terms of establishing a mechanism for scrutinising the success of past provision, it was noted that the Engagement Framework Management Group, driving the local agenda under the Framework, would receive and discuss the outcomes of the evaluations.
- It was explained that engagement with a third of referrals to ADTRAC had not been successful, and that the reasons for this were complex, including the reluctance of some young people to engage with the provision, a lack of time within project boundaries to nurture the relationship and the engagement, and the developmental age of some of the young people. However, it was often seen that young people who left school at the age of 16, without progressing into education, training or employment, were ready to engage in employment provision within a year or eighteen months.
- It was noted that TRAC and ADTRAC coordinated transition meetings on an annual basis, thereby identifying individuals who were at risk of not progressing to training or employment, and keeping track of them to some extent. As with ADTRAC, referrals to TRAC were complex cases, with some of those children reluctant to engage with the support. On a monthly basis, up to 1000 pupils could become eligible for TRAC support. Obviously, not all of them could receive a service. TRAC undertook mapping work to identify those most in need. Tracking pupils at College was undertaken by the College and Careers Wales.
- In terms of numbers, it was explained that over the last three years, 160 out of the 470 referrals to ADTRAC had not proceeded to register with the project. Data was available for comparison with other authorities, and this could be reported in writing to the scrutinisers.
- With regard to preventing Year 11 pupils from leaving school without transitioning into further education, training or employment, it was explained that Careers Wales was a full partner with Education, and that employers, etc., could be approached so that the young people could experience and see the options available to them.

- In terms of ensuring the future continuity of the service in the absence of European funding, it was noted that an evaluation of TRAC was being undertaken regionally, together with an evaluation of the impact of Covid. It was also intended to start a local evaluation so that any gaps left by TRAC could be identified. Work was also underway to map TRAC's legacy, but it would not be possible for any new model to be the same as the current model. TRAC drew in £3m of European funding over the six years (2016-2022). Models were looked at so that the Education Department adopted elements of TRAC within existing services, utilising services such as early intervention, communication and interaction, which mainly worked in the primary sector. The inclusion services could also inherit some TRAC principles. For it to work properly, the model would have to differ to what was already provided, and be creative and flexible with regard to the needs of these individuals. It was acknowledged that there was work to be done, and this would guide the TRAC Manager's work programme over the next 18 months, so that a model could be submitted to the Education Department, whether the Council received funding for that or not. With regard to ADTRAC, the Children Department had already remodelled its provision in the Youth Service to ensure follow-up arrangements to address some aspects of that project beyond the European funding period.
- In terms of continuity of support, it was noted that the evaluation looked at how TRAC blended in with the provision of some of the Council's other services, such as the schools, the Youth Service and the ALN and Inclusion Service, taking into account where the gaps were, where they could be filled, and where the gaps would obviously remain.
- It was noted that TRAC/ADTRAC worked with other Council departments to offer opportunities for individuals on schemes such as Kickstart to gain work experience with the Council.
- It was explained, as noted in Appendix 6 to the report, that the Framework was dependent on TRAC and ADTRAC in terms of the ability to identify young people who were likely to drop out of education, or who had dropped out of education, training or employment. The uncertainty as to when was the best time to review the Framework was a cause for concern. The Council was driven by ESF funding to review the provision and arrangements, but the whole Framework was dependent on funding that ended at different times. Parts of the post-16 provision had been reviewed, with the 11-16 element still to be reviewed. The scrutinisers were asked if they were comfortable that by being forced to review in the way we currently do, we were going to address the needs of the Framework as a whole, or whether they thought something was being missed by operating in this way, while accepting, at the same time, that it was impossible to do all the reviewing in one step. Although TRAC and ADTRAC were two comparatively key projects for the Framework, these were not the only resources to help the Council achieve its goal, and it was not clear at this stage whether all the provision was now understood. There was also a need to understand the relationship of the Framework to other economic and employability programmes, such as Communities for Work and Gwaith Gwynedd. The purpose of the Framework was to ensure that all young people were engaged in education, training, or employment, but Covid, and experience of TRAC and ADTRAC as projects, had shown that work or education interventions, in the sense of the education or learning curriculum, were not what some young people needed. There were challenges around the personal development and social circumstances of young people, and there may be room to question whether the Framework itself was now fit for purpose, as it sought to produce economic outputs and outcomes for all young people, although mental health, well-being and personal development

were seen to have been more of a barrier to young people getting back into education, training or employment over the last 12 months.

- In terms of targeting disaffected young people, drawing them into the Framework and supporting them, it was explained that TRAC worked with young people mainly through the schools. As the service sat within the Education Department, but was not a statutory service, it would be possible to be creative and flexible in what could be offered to these individuals. As well as working on the employability element, TRAC also worked on these young people's self-image and self-confidence, working with individuals who had behavioural problems too. Obviously, it was not possible to work with every individual, and they had to be on the TRAC radar, but the service worked with the most vulnerable young people.

A member noted that the funding question was far too complex for the scrutinisers to answer at present, and it was suggested that the committee should scrutinise the field further, and discuss the timetable for this at this committee's Annual Workshop in May. In response, it was noted that the officers would be very happy to attend the workshop, and the following were mentioned as matters requiring further attention:

- The impact of further evaluation on TRAC, and input into planning succession to TRAC.
- How would whatever happened after TRAC or ADTRAC fit into the wider provision if no funding was available.
- How to respond to changes in provision that occurred at different times, while continuing with transition and tracking arrangements, and also understanding the real impact of the changes on the young people, and their needs.
- The impact of Covid on the outcomes and experiences of pupils leaving the school system in July, not only academically, but also in terms of wider support.

It was noted that officers had been open and transparent in answering the scrutinisers' questions, and they were thanked for their work with a very vulnerable group of young people, who had significant challenges.

RESOLVED to accept the report, noting the observations made - particularly in respect of the suitability of the Framework's arrangements, the need to offer full support for young people who are at risk of disengaging/are disengaged from the field of education, training or employment, ensuring that these elements are addressed when reviewing our provisions in the future. Consideration should be given to scrutinising this field further, discussing the timetable for that at this committee's Annual Workshop in May.

6. REVIEW OF THE MOBILE LIBRARIES SERVICE

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Community and officers from the Economy and Community Department were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Economy and Community seeking the guidance of the scrutiny committee on the Mobile Service for Homes following a review of the current and historical provision within the Library Service. Members were invited to consider several options, based on the Service's findings of current demand and usage of the service, and savings that could be made from reviewing the pattern of provision.

The Cabinet Member set the context, noting that a number of benefits were seen to arise from the new system of Service delivery, which had started during the Covid crisis, and that the arrangement was increasingly appreciated as time went by.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and make observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:

- Although it was accepted that people welcomed the home service, there may be a need to urge and encourage people to venture out and socialise following the pandemic.
- Carers, etc., who called at people's homes, could pick up books and take them to the individual during their work time.
- The mobile vehicle could visit village halls, for example, when groups or 'paned' clubs met there.
- The use of electric/hybrid vans to provide the service, instead of the large lorries, was welcomed.
- It was understood that the new way of delivering the Service was not an opportunity to save money, and if the service saw the need to maintain the status quo, there was money available for that.
- The decision to introduce the change during the pandemic was questioned and it was asked whether it would be better to wait for things to settle first.
- Not visiting mobile stops would mean a 17% reduction in the number of households in Gwynedd who were within reach of a fixed or mobile library, and since the majority of the county's population lived in the towns anyway, that meant 17% of rural residents.
- People who were housebound, for whatever reason, very much welcomed the service to the home, and the scheme needed to be further developed, as well as given more publicity, e.g. by including an item in Newyddion Gwynedd. It was also suggested that it would be an idea to e-mail all councillors to inform them of the Service, asking them to disseminate the information via the main social media platforms to the residents of their wards. The Library Service Manager agreed to follow this up.
- The choice of books on a van is quite limited, and the service to the home expanded the choice of books, and reached everyone in the county.
- It was questioned whether people would want to congregate in a confined space like a van in the wake of Covid anyway.

In response to the observations and questions from members:

- It was noted that concerns had been raised prior to the pandemic regarding the year-on-year reduction in the numbers using the mobile stops, and that the length of stay at those stops had also declined over the years.
- It was explained that the service's previous experience and figures suggested that the reduction in the use of the mobile stops would continue in the future, as the pattern of life and people's needs had changed. Also, the stop was not ideal in bad weather, and the facility of having the service delivered to the home was more attractive.
- It was agreed that it was possible to develop the idea of improving the level of support given to Service users by, e.g. providing ICT equipment and internet access in mobile libraries, and using the service to enable residents in rural areas to access other Council services. Reference was made to two specific examples of how the new approach to the provision of a home delivery service had been successfully utilised, namely the use of a tackling poverty grant to provide period products to the home, and the 'Library of Things' project, which offered equipment on loan to the home, as part of the circular economy. It was noted that the service was working with a number of agencies and services in promoting these proposals.

- In terms of visits to groups, etc., it was noted that the service was able to respond to many enquiries of this type, targeting and tailoring the service to meet a host of different needs.
- It was noted that it was believed that there was enough slack in the system at present for one driver to be able to deliver the service across Arfon and Dwyfor, but that there was a need to tread carefully. This would have to be piloted first, but could be a further option when planning the service for the future.
- It was explained that the Welsh Public Library Standards Quality Indicator target had been set by the Welsh Government and measured proximity to a library, static service point, or mobile service point. However, by delivering to the home, it could be argued that the service reached 100% of the population.
- In terms of the timing, it was noted that the Covid period had allowed the Service to experiment, and as a consequence, it was seen that there was a different solution, which could reach more people and provide a better service.
- It was noted that people welcomed the reading packs prepared for them by members of staff, and that this was a good way to introduce readers to new authors.

The Library Service was thanked for the excellent service provided during the lockdown periods, and appreciation was also expressed for the audio books service.

RESOLVED to accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting, and to recommend to the Cabinet to adopt Option 1 in the report as the best provision and implementation model for the Mobile Libraries Service in the future, namely:

Step 1

A (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 3 smaller vehicles (electric/hybrid vans), each with a driver for:

1. Arfon
2. Dwyfor
3. Meirionnydd

Step 2

Following the retirement of a driver in the next 1-2 years, a (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 2 smaller vehicles (electric/hybrid vans), each with a driver for:

1. Arfon / Dwyfor
2. Meirionnydd

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.25 pm

CHAIRMAN