



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY 9TH APRIL 2013 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chairman
Councillor D.W.R. Preece - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, C. Gordon, D. Havard, M.P. James, G. Johnston, J. Pritchard, D. Rees and R. Saralis.

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: Mrs R. Passmore

Observing:

Cabinet Member for Performance and Asset Management: D. Hardacre

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Corporate Director Education and Lifelong Learning), B. Hopkins (Assistant Director, Our Schools Our Future, 21st Century Schools), K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion) E. Pryce (System Leader EAS), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer)

Co-opted Members: Mr A. Farina Childs (Parent Governor), Mrs A. Goss (Parent Governor) and Mrs P. Ireland (NUT)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.R. Davies, D.M. Gray, Mrs G.D. Oliver, J.E. Roberts and Mrs M.E. Sargent and from Mr. M. Western (Cardiff ROC).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

2. MINUTES - 28TH FEBRUARY 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee held on 28th February 2013 (minute nos. 1 - 16, on page nos. 1 - 6), be approved as correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

4. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LEISURE

Councillor Mrs R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning gave a verbal report and referred to the 'Topping Out' ceremony at the new Library and Customer Services Centre in Caerphilly, to mark the completion of the roof. Work at the site was progressing well with an expected completion date for the building element of the development as November 2013.

Library Services had received an award grant of £8,810 to establish a young person's creative film making club in the Risca Palace, which would include fortnightly session led by Zoom Cymru and monthly film nights.

Finally, Members were advised that the Royal Institute of British Architects had announced that two Caerphilly projects, Bargoed Library and Cwm Ifor Primary school had been shortlisted for architectural awards. If successful the projects would also be considered for the Gold Medal for Architecture award. In relation to Cwm Ifor it was noted that the National Eisteddfod of Wales would like the authority to make a submission for its exhibition in August.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports:-

5. AGENDA SUMMARY

The Scrutiny Committee noted the proposed agenda for the meeting.

6. OUR SCHOOLS, OUR FUTURE - UPDATE

The report sought to update Members on developments relating to 21st Century Schools and Capital Programme, it was noted that the Priority 3 bid, Secondary Rationalisation, incorporated a presentation and would therefore be addressed separately.

The Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) was detailed and Members noted the progress of the Priority 1 bid, the former St Ilan site. As no statutory objections to the notice published on the 18th February 2013 had been received, a report would now be submitted to Cabinet on the 30th April 2013 for determination. In relation to the Priority 2 bid, the Rhymney 3-18 proposal, the informal consultation process had commenced and the proposed safe route to schools scheme was nearing completion.

An update was given on the 2012/2013 capital programme and the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 proposals were detailed. Members noted the three main budget headings and the associated expenditure based on the capital priority list. The remainder of the programme followed an annual process where schools were given an opportunity to bid for projects during the autumn term. This initiative was popular with schools and maximised the limited funding available.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members questions on the Capital Programme and Priorities 1 and 2 were welcomed.

Clarification was sought in relation to the Priority 1 bid, a Member queried if consideration had been given to utilising an existing building rather than taking on a new build. Officer's confirmed a number of options had been considered but taking into account closure processes, the timescales and urgent capacity issues involved, utilising an alternative building would not have been a viable option going forward. The St. Ilan project provided an ideal opportunity to use a mix of existing buildings with the addition of a new build for the secondary phase.

A request was made that reports previously presented to Scrutiny on 21st Century Schools be circulated in order to assist newer Members understanding of the issues. Officers confirmed that copies of the reports in question would be emailed to all Members.

Concerns were expressed in relation to contractor issues and Officers gave a full explanation of the procurement framework and the challenges currently being experienced with regard to additional cost claims from building contractors. Members fully discussed procurement considerations and noted the safeguards in relation to quality, value for money, health and safety and fair pay incorporated into the process.

Having fully considered Priorities 1 and 2 and the Capital Works Programme the Scrutiny Committee noted the information contained in the report and received a presentation on the Priority 3 bid, Secondary Rationalisation.

The presentation provided the background to the current and project position of schools in relation to surplus places, clarified assessment considerations and key issues along with possible trigger points. Example data was provided in order to illustrate possible ways forward and different options appraisals were outlined for consideration.

Key data examples were provided and incorporated a breakdown of the pupil profile, building condition, catchment area and overall suitability of schools using a traffic light system and this information was also summarised on an individual school basis. Schools performance data along with banding positions were shown and it was noted that this information would also be incorporated into the evaluation process. Finally an example of an individual school summary was presented, this gave an overview of a schools current position including pupil data, geographical position, catchment area and performance information.

Officers advised that the evaluation process would require a significant investment of Members time and suggested that consideration be given to appointing a Cross Party Working Group to conduct the preliminary options appraisals and then report back to the Scrutiny Committee.

Clarification was sought in relation to the possible timetable of meetings and Officers confirmed that a commitment of two x half days per week would be necessary. Members fully discussed the implications of the proposed timeframe and agreed that a Working Group of between 8-10 Members would be the best option. Members also felt that in order to ensure continued numbers and consistent representation that substitutes be nominated. It was agreed that Democratic Services would schedule a series meetings and forward dates and times to Members, once received those able to make the commitment should inform the Scrutiny Research Officer accordingly.

Clarification was sought in relation to the 15% surplus places target set by Welsh Government and whether this could be achieved with a single school closure. Officers confirmed that a single closure might bring surplus places closer to target, however careful consideration needed to be given to the all the contributing factors and balanced against the best possible use of the £60M budget for the rationalisation programme.

Officers confirmed that capacity would be closely looked at and a detailed survey completed in order to ensure that room usage had been accurately recorded. Concerns were expressed in relation to catchment areas and Members were advised that these would also be reviewed.

The Scrutiny Committee having fully considered its content noted the report and presentation.

7. PRESENTATION - BANDING A TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

The presentation provided a technical overview of Banding as an indicator of performance.

The data groups were defined and Members noted the 12 indicators that contributed to the measurement of performance. Members noted the impact that performance in English, Welsh and Maths had on banding and noted that the calculations used were based on the premise that all cohorts were the same.

Banding methodology was explained and noted that for each of the 12 sub indicators schools would be put into rank order and then split into quarters 1-4. Band boundaries were outlined along with a breakdown of the distribution of schools across Wales within each of the bands 1-5.

Members were asked to note that Primary School Banding had been postponed until September 2014 and would likely use data from the new national reading and numeracy tests.

A simple analysis of local authority average school banding scores were summarised and Members noted that Caerphilly was slightly below the Welsh average but above other local authorities in the area.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the presentation and Members questions were welcomed.

Concerns were expressed that Banding did not accurately reflect the progress being made in a school and Officer's acknowledged this as an issue with the banding system and advised that the All Wales Core Data Set would provide Members with a more rounded analysis of performance.

Clarification was sought in relation to the origin of the data that determined the awarding of a particular band and Officers confirmed that all data came directly from external examination boards and was externally verified.

The Scrutiny Committee having fully considered its content noted the presentation.

8. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Committee noted the forward work programme for the 5th June 2013.

9. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE PLACED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

No requests were received for items to be placed on the next available agenda.

10. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports, none of which were brought forward for review:

1. The Post Inspection Action Plan in Response to the Estyn Inspection July 2012.
2. Local Participation Action Plan for Children and Young People.

The meeting closed at 18:45 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2013, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN