



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 5TH JULY 2016 AT 5.30PM.**

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chair
Councillor J. Pritchard - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, C. Gordon, M.P. James, Mrs G.D. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece, D. Rees, R. Saralis and J. Simmonds.

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), B. Hopkins (Assistant Director Our Schools Our Future), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

Also Present:

L. Griffiths (Headteacher, Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Caerffili), O. ap. Dafydd (Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni) and T. Williams (Headteacher, Islwyn High School).

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr A. Farina-Childs (Parent Governor), Mrs A. Gross (Parent Governor) and Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT).

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair on behalf of Members and Officers thanked Mr A. Farina-Childs and Mrs A. Gross for their contributions, hard work and commitment as Parent Governor Representatives to the Committee over the last four years, and now that their term of office had come to an end wished them well in their future endeavours.

Mr Farina-Childs and Mrs Gross thanked Members and Officers for the welcome they received at their first meeting and for the support provided to them over the last four years.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.W. Davies, G. Johnston, J.E. Roberts and Mrs M.E. Sargent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was received during the course of the meeting from Councillor D. Rees in relation to Agenda Item 11, All Through Schools details are minuted with the respective item.

3. MINUTES – 24TH MAY 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 23rd February 2016 (minute nos. 1-15) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER

Councillor D. Havard (Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning) provided an update on Library Services, the Youth Service Conference, Adult Learning, Tynywern Primary School, St. Cenydd KS3 Satellite Class and Learning Pathways Centres.

The Ystrad Mynach Library improvements are well in hand and were noted to include increases to ICT provision, a dedicated Young People's space, improved 'retail' type shelving, study space and comfortable seating area. A bright, welcoming, child friendly space is also included where toddler story times and activities are already being planned. The library will be closed for 5 weeks during September 2016 for the work to be undertaken.

The CCBC Youth Service, together with its regional partners, hosted this year's regional Youth Service Conference at Llancaiach Fawr on Tuesday, 28th June, to mark the celebration of National Youth Work Week.

The Gwent 5 County ACL partnership will celebrate the achievement of tutors, volunteers, individual and groups of learners from Caerphilly at its partnership awards event. Nominees included Emma Matusczyk-Jones – Caerphilly Tutor of the Year; Ceri Oliver – Caerphilly Learner of the Year and CACHE Level 3 – Caerphilly Group of the Year.

The Cabinet Member congratulated Tynywern School on their nomination for a Welsh Heritage Schools Initiative award this year for their project "The Museum of Trethomas" and advised that this was the 7th consecutive year they have won an award.

The Committee were informed that building on from the success of the Cwm Ifor Primary School satellite class and to give children from Trinity Fields further inclusion opportunities St Cenydd Community Comprehensive School has agreed to host a KS3 satellite class from September 2016.

Finally the Cabinet Member updated the Committee on the Learning Pathway Centres being developed in a number of schools across the local authority to support a cohort of young people who require a more bespoke curriculum pathway.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his report.

6. EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Head of Democratic Services presented the report which outlined the draft Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme from May 2016 to April 2017.

Members were asked to consider the work programme and make any amendments or propose any additional items to be included for future meetings.

Following consideration and discussion it was agreed that there were no requests to be added at this time but any future items for inclusion should be forwarded to Cath Forbes-Thompson.

7. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

8. 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS – UPDATE AND PRESENTATION

The Assistant Director, Our Schools Our Future introduced the report and along with Head Teachers Lynn Griffiths (Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Caerffili), Owain ap Dafydd (Ysgol Gynfun Cwm Rhymni) and Tim Williams (Islwyn High Schools) provided an update on the progress of the three schemes under the 21st Century Schools programme.

It was noted that the Islwyn High School's build contract was progressing well and generally ahead of schedule and there had been no change to the planned completion date in late April 2017.

Mr T. Williams, Head Teacher Islwyn High School gave a brief presentation on the progress of the school build. The challenges in harmonising two very different schools were outlined and the progress made noted. The Committee were advised that staffing arrangements had been finalised without redundancies and a healthy initial budget was anticipated for the first year.

Mr Williams referenced the Committee's previously expressed concerns in relation to the size of the site and recreation and physical education (PE) space. He acknowledged that this was limited and would need to be carefully managed. Meetings had been held with Officers and a curriculum analysis undertaken with regard to PE in order to secure the best way forward. A 4G state of the art pitch would be available onsite but additional pitch facilities would be shared with Rhiw Syr Dafydd Primary School. It was accepted that this arrangement was far from ideal given the distance between the two sites and the steepness of the hill leading to the playing fields. Health and safety issues surrounding car parking and traffic management were referenced and it was noted that there were only 107 parking spaces available for the 150 teaching plus catering staff. This shortfall would be a particular concern during school events as on these occasions there would be no additional capacity available. Members were also made aware of existing traffic issues during peak times for Rhiw Syr Dafydd when there were periods of grid-lock.

This said Mr Williams emphasised the positives connected to the site, with the school securing allotments and a large plot of land for sustainable development work. He voiced his excitement about this wonderful project that would provide a first class school and thanked the Local Authority for its investment.

The Chair thanked Mr Williams for his presentation and Members questions were welcomed.

Clarification was sought with regard to interior space provision in terms of accommodating pupil numbers. Mr Williams assured the Committee that there was adequate space to accommodate all pupils plus a resource base for 50 pupils with complex needs.

In terms of the wellbeing matters Members queried if any mitigating action plans had been drawn up, particularly as this would be a an ESTYN inspection consideration. Mr Williams advised that the Senior Management Team at Islwyn High were aware of the issues and would be better able to gauge an appropriate cause of action once the school had opened.

In order to get a better understanding of the site it was moved and seconded that a site visit be arranged with the Cabinet Members for Highways and Education, Local Ward Members, Chair of Governors, Members of the Scrutiny Committee and appropriate Officers and that a report of the visit be brought back to this committee, by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that a site visit to the Islwyn High School be arranged and a report on the visit be placed on the Forward Work Programme for consideration by the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee.

In relation to the Y Gwyndy scheme, the Committee were advised that Phase 3 had been delayed 3 months and completed late in the autumn term 2015. Phases 2 and 3 had been officially opened by the First Minister in December 2015. Phase 4 comprising of a 3G pitch, junior sized grass pitch and hard play areas commenced in May 2016 and is expected to be completed by end October 2016. The Assistant Director outlined the project milestones and capacity issues that had led to the development.

Mr Lyn Griffiths, Headteacher Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Caerffili introduced his presentation which updated the Committee on the improvements and vision for the new school.

The Committee were advised that all classes were now fit for purpose being 30% larger in terms of floor space, are lighter and have better acoustics, providing much needed space for collaborative working. The Nursery area is spacious with room to deliver the foundation phase principles effectively. Flying Start provision is closer to the site which will further enhance opportunities for joint activities and planning. Break out areas allow pupils from different classes to complete work together. Those with specific needs can be met far more sensitively and more able and talented pupils have opportunities to be challenged and grow.

The Foundation Phase area can be accessed at all times and in all weather conditions which allows fine and gross motor skills to be developed. Break out class provision for KS2 pupils enable them to undertake specialist work including music lessons. There are also a number of specialist rooms on site where specific targeted work can be accomplished.

The new School Hall means that for the first time, whole school assemblies can be held, PE lessons can take place in the winter months and schools concerts and productions can be easily accommodated. Furthermore the single site location allows the transition between KS2 and KS3 to be far more effective.

ICT provision now has a designated 'suite' which includes an interactive white board, this ensures that pupils can access the new ICT Framework and develop the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the 21st Century.

The Chair thanked Mr Griffiths for his presentations and Members questions were welcomed.

Members queried the children's reaction to the new school and its facilities and Mr Griffiths confirmed that they are thrilled particularly as they had been given the opportunity to visit and contribute during its development.

Mr Owain ap Dafydd, Headteacher Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni introduced his presentation which updated Members on the challenges and opportunities for the Y Gwyndy campus and how Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni as a pioneering school would progress.

Mr ap Dafydd outlined the challenges of managing two sites 7 miles apart, it was noted that both sites will receive the same curriculum and same option choices at KS4, however some very specialist or minority subjects might need to be taught at the Gellihaf site with pupils travelling between the two.

Key milestones in terms of GCSE results and the Successful Futures Curriculum were eagerly anticipated however the possibility of providing a sixth form on the Y Gwyndy site would require careful consideration going forward.

The Chair thanked Mr ap Dafydd for his presentation and Members questions were welcomed.

Members queried the biggest challenge for the two sites going forward and were advised that this would be the organisation of the sites as the school grows, sustaining standards, managing resources and working collaboratively and effectively. This would be hard work for the Leadership Team but also a fantastic opportunity.

Clarification was sought with regard to possible sixth form provision on the Gwyndy site and Mr ap Dafydd explained that there were several options with potential going forward. He advised that each site had its pros and cons, for example, space would be an issue in holding a single sixth form on the Gelli Haf site as there is more room available at Y Gwyndy but some specialist subjects would require the facilities offered at Gelli Haf.

Members noted the increased demand for Welsh Medium Education and that there had been 70 applications for 55 nursery spaces and sought clarification on how the school would keep up with the demand and take into account parental choice. Mr Griffiths confirmed that all children within the catchment area of the school had been allocated a place however all three of the Caerphilly Basin Welsh Schools were close to capacity.

A Member thanked Mr ap Dafydd and Mr Griffiths for delivering their presentation in English and asked if they had experienced any difficulties in recruiting Welsh speaking staff.

Mr Griffiths confirmed that in terms of Classroom Assistants the majority were locally trained with 20% made up of ex-pupils, Welsh Medium Nursery Assistants were at a premium, but by recruiting robustly the school hadn't experienced any issues. Mr ap Dafydd concurred and advised that many of his teaching and support staff were also ex-pupils. He explained the difficulties experienced recruiting specialist assistants and support staff such as Educational Psychologists or School Based Counsellors who did not tend to speak Welsh but confirmed that in these instances it was the quality of the individual that would take priority.

Finally in his update on Abertysswg/Pontlottyn Primary, the Assistant Director confirmed that the project had experienced some delay due to the higher than anticipated costs at the tender stage, a revised total scheme cost has now received Welsh Government approval and it is anticipated that the build programme would be completed for opening in January 2018.

Clarification was sought as to when the construction programme would actually begin and the Officer confirmed that this would commence in October 2016 for a period of 12 months with an anticipated opening in January 2018.

Having fully considered the updates the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee noted the Officer's report and Head Teacher presentations.

9. SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY

The Assistant Director, Our Schools Our Future, introduced the report which sought Members' views on a future Schools Place Planning Strategy.

Members were advised of the statutory duty of Local Authorities to supply sufficient school places and that the planning and provision of schools places can often be a complex and challenging task. The introduction of a School Places Plan could assist with the formulation of future key strategic decisions.

Considerations such as the 21st Century School Programme, Surplus Places, Schools Condition Surveys, Catchment Area changes, Governance and Federation arrangements as well as All Through Schools and their impact on schools places planning were highlighted and the key issues were summarised.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members views were sought on the proposals for a future School Place Planning Strategy as part of the consultation process.

Members expressed concern in relation to catchment areas and the impact that the recent announcement from Cwmcarn High School would have and agreed that capacity issues should be considered sooner rather than later in terms for forward planning.

Clarification was sought in relation to the Band B element of the 21st Century School programme and if any indications had been received from Welsh Government in this regard. The Officer confirmed that an indication had been received that for 2019-2024 a sum of £500M would be available but this would be revenue rather than the capital investment provided under Band A. There had been no announcement beyond that and Officers would have to wait until early autumn for further clarity.

Members referenced the closure announcement from Cwmcarn High School and the Chief Education Officer outlined the actions taken following the decision of the Governing Body.

Having fully considered its content the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee noted the report and endorsed the provision of a School Place Planning Strategy.

10. FEDERATION OF SCHOOLS

The Assistant Director Our Schools Our Future introduced the report which provided background into the Welsh Government's policy on the federation of schools and proposed using this arrangement for 3 groups of schools already working together.

The benefits of federation were outlined for Members information and it was noted that each school within a federation would retain their name, category, budget, staff and Headteacher, if it wishes, however a single Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher can be appointed to manage all of the schools within that federation.

Members were referred to section 4.22 of the report which outlined the proposed arrangements between Bedwas Junior and Rhydri Primary Schools; Pengam and Fleur De Lis Primary Schools and Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu Primary Schools. The Officer confirmed that the categorisation of the schools was very positive and the next phase would be to commence a formal consultation process.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members questions and comments were sought on the proposals.

Clarification was sought as to what could compromise possible Federation arrangements. The Officer explained that the biggest issue would be the implications for the Parent and Community Governors as there would be a reduction in numbers under Federation. He advised that there were certain other constraints attached to the regulations for example you cannot federate a Community School with a Foundation School, apart from that there are very few downsides to the process.

Reference was made to the sharing of staff and if there would be any pressure placed on teachers appointed pre-federation to move to the other school. Members were advised that teachers can be appointed to both or continue to work singularly, however Headteachers' time would be split between the two benefitting both by reducing associated costs. Members were reassured that existing staff could not be forced to work in other areas.

Members asked that consideration be given to including information on possible Federation in new contracts of employment or at the application stage to ensure that candidates are aware that this could be a possibility going forward.

Having fully considered the report it was moved and seconded that the proposed Federation arrangements as detailed in section 4.22 be approved and Cabinet be informed of the endorsement of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be informed of the comments and endorsement of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee for the proposed pilot Federation arrangements as detailed in section 4.22 of the Officer's report.

11. ALL THROUGH SCHOOLS

During the course of debate Councillor D. Rees declared a personal interest as All Through Schools are known to him through his role at Blaenau Gwent Council, who have led on 3-16 Peer Group of Local Authorities in Wales, referenced within the report.

The Assistant Director, Our Schools Our Future, introduced the report which sought Members views on the benefits of 'All-through' schools and to consider the proposed pilot to establish a Rhymney 3-18 school.

The Committee were advised that an 'All-through' school comprised of multiple phases of Education provision within a single institution. The benefits of such a school were outlined and the growing body of evidence to support this approach was noted. The Officer confirmed that performance dips often associated with pupil transfers were reduced in All-through Schools, there are opportunities for improved teaching and learning, improved pastoral care for pupils in challenging circumstances and improved continuity for multi-agency involvement across phases.

The Rhymney site would ideally lend itself to this arrangement and there would be an opportunity to structure and protect existing staff with Governing Bodies brought together. Members were advised that the proposal if initiated would be subject to a statutory process which would commence with the issuing of a consultation document.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

Clarification was sought with regard to outside admission arrangements and if they could be fair and equitable. The Officer confirmed that this would be a challenge going forward, however pupils admitted at 3 years would automatically transition through to the age of 18 so it would be an advantage for them over others. Fortunately Rhymney has enough surplus places to accommodate all their feeder schools.

Members queried the future of sixth form provision and whether the stated 3-18 arrangement could be subject to review. The Officer confirmed that a sixth form was already in place at the school and there were no plans to discontinue this option. However it would be possible to highlight that sixth form provision could be subject to rationalisation in the consultation document as part of the statutory process and the committee agreed that they would want to see this included.

A Member expressed his support for the All-Through Schools initiative having knowledge of the positive impact it has made within Blaenau Gwent, seamless transition, sharing good practice, improvements in attainment, make this initiative a very exciting and reward prospect.

Having fully considered its content the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee noted the report and fully endorsed the proposal to establish a Rhymney 3-18 All-Through School.

The meeting closed at 20:25pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2016 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR