



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER 2018 AT 5.30PM.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Havard - Chair
Councillor C. Andrews - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, A. Collis, S. Cook, A. Farina-Childs, D.T. Hardacre, B. Miles, Mrs T. Parry, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Simmonds and R. Whiting

P. Marsden (Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement)

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), A. Davies (Service Manager for EOTAS and Behaviour), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), J. Southcombe (Financial Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer) and K. Houghton (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governor) and Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT)

L. Jones (Estyn), J. Wright (Estyn) and Mr. D. Witchell (Headteacher, Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu Primary Schools)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W. David, M.P. James, Mrs G.D. Oliver, Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), Mr M. Barry (Parent Governor) and Mrs J. Havard (NUT).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 25TH SEPTEMBER 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday the 25th September 2018 (minute nos 1-8) 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

The Cabinet Member, Councillor P. Marsden referred the Committee to her newsletter which was circulated earlier in the week. Members were asked to note the contents which included an update on various initiatives being run through the County Borough's libraries, the new 3G pitch at Blackwood Comprehensive School, free courses made available to help adults into employment and an update on attendance and exclusions in schools.

The Committee noted the successes of Trinant Primary pupils at the National Skill Force Prince William Award Ceremony, Lewis School Pengam featuring in the upcoming play 'Broken Harp' and improved attendance in secondary schools within the County Borough.

The Cabinet Member highlighted to Members that education in Wales was in a state of flux in terms of delivering the Welsh Government's national vision for education. This vision will see learners' achievements counting towards performance with an overriding principal of children learning to their own needs, this more qualitative approach represents a shift away from more quantitative based measures and will release the pressure on schools to compete on performance.

Members discussed the attendance and exclusion update. A Member enquired as to why the reduction was measured in number of days. The Chief Education Officer explained that there were a number of indicators used to measure attendance however using the number of days lost indicator allows for more accurate and regular year on year comparison.

The Chief Education Officer confirmed that the Service had been focussing on secondary school attendance and exclusions, it was noted that meetings had been taking place to look specifically at exclusions and the outcomes from these had been positive. Members were advised that there is a report on the Committee's Forward Work Programme on attendance and exclusions, currently listed under a date to be confirmed, which would look at the data in more detail.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for her report.

6. EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report which outlined the draft Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme from November 2018 to April 2019. Members were reminded that there will be a Special meeting of the Committee on Monday 17th December 2018 to discuss the draft budget proposals for 2019/20.

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

A member enquired as to why the overarching strategy for improvement is not on the

Corporate Risk Register. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services informed Members that the underpinning strategy for improvement was being developed and would be presented alongside the Performance Key stage 4 and 5 report due to come to the January meeting of the Committee.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the work programme appended to the report be approved.

7. CABINET REPORTS

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. CONSULTATION – PROPOSAL TO FEDERATE

Presentation from Mr D. Witchell, Head Teacher for Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu Primary Schools

With the agreement of the Chair and Committee approval it was agreed that Mr Witchells' presentation be brought forward on the agenda.

Mr D. Witchell, Head Teacher, Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu Primary Schools gave a presentation outlining the benefits of schools working collaboratively and the proposed move to federation.

Mr Witchell detailed the various benefits of collaboration, including the sharing of resources, shared professional development opportunities for staff and how this integration was raising the standards of learning across the two schools. He confirmed that for him the raising standards was the main driver for seeking formal federation. Other benefits of federation included the formation of a single joint governing body and greater security for two small schools to continue to serve the communities around them.

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

Members queried how a joint governing body would manage issues that may be specific to an individual school and whether there would be a significant increase in the governing body's workload. Mr Witchell informed Members that the collaboration between the Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu had been five years in the making and both governing bodies were keen to move to federation. He highlighted that as two small schools it had been difficult in the past to manage the work load and remain quorate and so a joint body would benefit both schools. This collective approach would also ensure benefits for both school communities. He also stated that work load could be managed through more frequent meetings of the full governing body and increased numbers of sub-committees which would feed in to the full governing body meeting.

On behalf of the Committee the Chair thanked Mr Witchell for his attendance and wished him and Cwmfelinfach and Ynysddu Primary Schools every future success.

The Head of Education Planning and Strategy introduced the report which presented the proposal to federate the four groups of schools – Park Primary and Gilfach Primary Schools, Fleur de Lys Primary and Pengam Primary Schools, Bedwas Junior and Rhydri Primary

Schools; and Ynysddu Primary and Cwmfelinfach Primary Schools. Members were asked to comment on the proposals as part of the consultation process as outlined in the Welsh Government Federation of Schools Regulations 2014.

Members were advised that the four groups of schools identified for proposed federation had been working collaboratively for a number of years and the driver for formalising the arrangements were the benefits it would bring for children and young people in those schools by enhancing educational provision, raising standards, improving services and increasing opportunities.

The Head of Education Planning and Strategy highlighted to Members that schools in a federation would be able to maintain their own delegated budget, name, character, uniform and ethos but will have the opportunity to share resources such as facilities, IT and staff. She outlined to Members the timetable for moving the schools to federation, with the consultation period due to end on the 10th December 2018. Responses would be collated and discussed with governing bodies in January/February 2019 and a report would come to this Committee in April 2019 prior to seeking approval at Cabinet. If approved the new Instrument of Governance for the single Federated Governing Bodies would be established in June/July 2019 in readiness for commencement in September 2019.

Members were informed that a lot of work had been put into the governing body arrangements particularly in terms of numbers of governors per federation sitting on the joint governing body. It was found that in a lot of cases governors had already been serving on both governing bodies due to the number of years that the schools had been working collaboratively.

In summary, the Head of Education Planning and Strategy drew Members attention to page 4 of Appendix A to the Officer's report which presents the proposal, page 9 of Appendix A which lists the benefits of federation and Appendix 3 which contains a list, produced by Welsh Government, of Frequency Asked Questions.

Members debated the provision of one governing body per federation and raised concerns that the work load of a joint governing body covering two schools would be too difficult to manage among its volunteer members. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy explained that the four school groups identified for proposed federation had been working collaboratively for a number of years this included their governing bodies and a joint governing body is seen as a benefit for smaller schools as it provides greater security and alleviates problems encountered with filling all the Governor seats. The Chief Education Officer highlighted to Members that with the exception of Fleur de Lys Primary and Pengam Primary schools, the decision to federate has grown from a point of mutual need and gave assurances that any potential increase in work for the governing bodies would be balanced off by the benefits that federation would bring to the schools.

Members enquired as to whether the County Borough had ever experienced a failed collaboration between two schools and what would happen in the event that a school federation was failing. The Officer explained that the schools proposed for federation have been collaborating for a long time and so the working relationship has been tested and is at a point where it would be disadvantageous to the schools if they stopped. The Chief Education Officer advised Members that there had been one instance where two schools worked collaboratively on a short term basis but both schools opted to end the collaboration once it had served its function. In the event that schools are formally federated and wished to separate then a formal consultation with stakeholders and approval process would need to take place.

Members questioned Officers regarding performance. Members asked whether best practices within one federation would be rolled out as an example to others and what would happen if federated schools were performing badly or if one school was performing below that of the other school, creating an imbalance, within the federation. The Chief Education Officer

confirmed that it was usual for schools to share best practice and explained in terms of poor performance it would be unlikely that there would be an imbalance between federated schools as the stronger school would support the weaker. If a federation is well placed then the two schools would mutually enable and improve each other thus raising standards. If a federation was failing across the board then it would be dealt with in the same way as a single low performing school would be with the usual interventions.

Members sought clarification on the Head Teacher arrangements under federation and what happened to the savings made from the single salary.. The Chief Education Officer confirmed to Members that for the full benefits of federation to be achieved then a single head teacher across both schools would need to be in place and the salary saving achieved would be retained within the schools budget.

Members highlighted some discrepancies in regard to the wording of a number of the Frequently Asked Questions detailed in Appendix 3, this was in particular regard to questions 8 and 11. Officers responded that they would need to seek clarification from Welsh Government who produced the document.

A final query from a Member related to the grouping of Bedwas Junior and Rhydri Primary Schools and why Bedwas Infants School was not included in this group. The Chief Education Officer explained that at the time that Rhydri Primary School entered special measures, Bedwas Infants School was not in a position to provide support however Bedwas Junior School was and were keen to work in collaboration. When the permanent Headship for Bedwas Infants was being recruited the school was again offered the opportunity to work within the collaboration but they opted not to do so.

The Chair thanked the Officer for their report and Members for their questions and comments.

9. SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE EDUCATION DIRECTORATE'S SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The Strategic Lead for School Improvement introduced the report that informed Members of the process of self-evaluation and its impact on the Education Directorate's Service Improvement Plan, and provided Members with a summary of key strengths and priorities for improvement that had been identified as a result of the self-evaluation process.

The Officer highlighted to Members that the self-evaluation process was an important part of the overall cycle of service improvements and underpins learning in Caerphilly. He took Members through each key point as found in the Officer's report which included detail on the self-evaluation policy and process, strategies to improve self-evaluation, the role of self-evaluation and the main themes from the self-evaluation process.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and welcomed questions from the Members.

A discussion took place where Members sought clarification on the acronym FADE, where they were informed that it stood for Focus, Analyse, Develop and Evaluate. Members enquired as to whether reporting on the self-evaluation process could be made simpler and show more of an overview. Officers advised that performance would be reported more clearly in the Key Stage 4 and 5 report, due to come to the Committee in January and that it is difficult to give an overview on the process but the reports do try to provide the 'big picture' view. Further to this discussion, the Chair requested that each strategy employed in the last 12 months to improve self-evaluation be reported, in terms of their performance, to the Committee. The Strategic Lead for School Improvement stated that he would welcome the opportunity to report on the progress and activities of each of the improvement strategies.

A Member enquired as to who had ownership of driving the self-evaluation process throughout the directorate. The Strategic Lead for School Improvement responded that ownership was

across all the service managers and their teams with the aim of establishing good self-evaluation practices that permeate throughout the whole service.

A Member referred the Committee and Officers to section 4.3.2 of the Officer's report and sought clarification on when Indicators 2.3 – Other Education Support Services and 3.3 Professional Learning would be reported to the Committee. Officers responded that the work towards forming these reports had been done and if the Committee were minded, these could be added to the Forward Work Programme for a date to be confirmed.

A Member made an enquiry regarding the Flying Start Programme and it only being in place in one of the two schools in his ward and whether the programme would be rolled out to all schools at some point in the future and had the criteria for eligibility changed. The Early Years Manager clarified that the Welsh Government's original objective for the Flying Start Programme was to reach 25% of children. The funding is not large and the programme is aimed at the early learning stage of learning and the most vulnerable children, therefore progress and tangible outcomes have not come overnight. In terms of the eligibility criteria, she confirmed that there had been a change and this was due to the introduction of universal credit which meant that more children would be eligible.

It was commented on by Members that the Flying Start Programme, Key Stage 4 and 5 improvement plan and EOTAS improvements were long term issues and raised concerns over the escalating costs in supporting this work.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

10. EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL (EOTAS)

The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services introduced the report which updated Members on the intended course of action to address the current service and financial challenges associated with the provision of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) across the County Borough. He outlined to Members the current financial position of of EOTAS provision, as detailed in the Officer's report.

The Chief Education Officer emphasised to Members that there is a real need to focus on the EOTAS provision, which supports the most vulnerable group of learners, looking at how the service is working, how can value for money be achieved and how the service can work differently to maximise the funding available to it. She briefed the Members on a number of improvements being planned including increased internal EOTAS places for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils and the County Borough establishing itself as a centre of excellence with specially trained staff working across the area. Other improvements were listed including the formation of bespoke learning packages for vulnerable learners at Heolddu and Lewis Pengam secondary schools and establishing a joint approach from schools, youth workers and tutors to provide improved home learning. In addition there will be increased professional development opportunities for staff and outreach teams to specialise in managing challenging behaviour so as to reduce the number of exclusions and better meet the needs of vulnerable learners.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and welcomed questions from the Members.

Members enquired as to how the County Borough compared to other similar Local Authorities in terms of increasing cost pressures on providing EOTAS within their own areas. The Chief Education Officer advised Members that this was a national challenge and these pressures were receiving a lot of national attention. Caerphilly County Borough Council is considered as

taking an innovative approach to addressing the pressures and producing best practice approaches. It was noted that these best practices will be shared with the regional group.

The Chair thanked the Officer for their report and Members for their questions and comments.

The meeting closed at 19:28pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 8th January 2019 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR