



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry – Chair
Councillor B. Miles - Vice Chair

Councillors:

E.M. Aldworth, C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, P. Cook, D. Cushing, M. Evans, C. Gordon, T. Heron, A. Leonard, J. Roberts, J. Simmonds and J Winslade.

Cabinet Member Councillors:

Councillor C. Andrews (Education and Communities) and E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care), S. Morgan (Leader) J. Pritchard (Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change)

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), A. West (Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director – Head of Childrens Services), J. Willimas (Assistant Director – Adult Services), C. Howells (Project Coordinator), P. O'Neill (Senior Youth Service Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Co-opted Members: Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative), and Mrs P Ireland (NEU).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Broughton – Pettit, A. Farina-Childs, S Skivens, and K. Woodland, together with Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. 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.

4. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period September 2023 to April 2024.

The Scrutiny Committee requested that the 2023/24 Budget Monitoring report (month 3) information Item be added to the Forward Programme for the main agenda on the 17th October 2023, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved.

One Member observed that certain Information Items should be scheduled on main agendas and discussed within the public domain. The Scrutiny Officer highlighted that it was possible for the Committee to request that identified Information Reports be scheduled for discussion on meeting agendas instead, alternatively they could email any questions directly to the author.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of electronic voting (and in noting there were 14 For 0 Against and 0 Abstention).

Subject to the inclusion of the aforementioned item it was RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

5. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 - PROPOSAL FOR THE CLOSURE OF CWM GLAS INFANT SCHOOL

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented a report to the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee which sought Members endorsement on the recommendation to Cabinet to proceed to consultation in respect of the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School by July 2024.

It was noted that due to the falling rolls at Cwm Glas Infant school which are projected to decrease further in future years, a meeting was arranged by the Head Teacher and the Governing Body with Local Authority representatives including the Chief Education Officer, to discuss the future viability of the school. It was agreed at this meeting the school could no longer maintain a balanced budget and an appropriate staffing level. Therefore, a decision was made by the Head Teacher and Governing Body of the School to pursue closure of Cwm Glas Infant School with effect from July 2024.

The Members further noted that currently Cwm Glas Infant School shares a catchment area with Coed-y-Brain Primary School where pupils transition to at Key Stage 2 subject to parental preference. It is proposed to transition the pupils at Foundation Phase, to deliver an inclusive all-through primary school provision. Subject to Cabinet approval, this will result in the proposed closure of Cwm Glas Infants School with effect from July 2024.

In response to queries raised from Members, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager advised Members that they are unable to confirm why 50% of the children attending Cwm Glas Infant school are from outside the catchment area, as the parents/guardians do not have to provide this information as part of the admission application process. The Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager also highlighted those pupils outside the catchment area still lived within 2-3 miles of the school.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager confirmed that pupils outside the catchment area would be part of the proposed transition to Coed-y-Brain Primary School if the proposal went ahead. The Officer further advised that there was sufficient provision to accommodate all pupils at Coed-y-Brain but that this was subject to parental preference. The same process as was currently in place when pupils transitioned to Coed-y-Brain Primary School at Key Stage 2.

Members were also assured that the governing body for Coed-y-Brain would be fully consulted if permission were given to proceed to the consultation stage.

Members were pleased to note that Cwm Glas Infants had received a very successful ESTYN report, with no follow ups. Within the report the school was praised for the support and guidance given to the pupils.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and with one verbal vote (and in noting that there were 16 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee:

1. Noted the contents of the report and endorsed the recommendation to Cabinet to proceed to consultation on the proposal to close Cwm Glas Infant School with effect from July 2024.

7. UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST NEETS-REDUCTION ACTIONS AND CURRENT ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented the report which provided the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee with an update on the progress regarding Caerphilly's 2021/22 NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) results (published April 2023) in the context of the current 5-year target schedule.

The Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the operational improvements contributing to the reduction of the number of NEET young people.

It was noted that the NEETS performance is on track against the projected targets for the current five-year period and the results for 2021/22 have met the stated target.

The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note that other services combine well to identify those at risk of becoming NEET and Caerphilly is in the top three highest performing authorities in Wales in this regard.

It was further noted that Caerphilly County Borough Councils NEETs-reduction actions now require review and amendment to best meet the authority's ambitions and associated targets for the coming year(s).

The Strategic Lead for School Improvement advised the Education and Social Services Committee that over the past 12 months the Authority has looked at resetting the priorities through the Education Strategy, and NEETS is very much one of those main priorities.

It has looked at ways in which to improve and add extra support for the children and young people who are at risk of leaving school without suitable education, employment or training in place.

In response to queries raised by the Scrutiny Committee the Senior Youth Service Manager advised Members that sometimes maintaining contact with the young people can be one of the greatest problems. This is due to pupils' telephone numbers often changing, including over the 6-week school holiday period and some NEET situations cannot be resolved due either to pregnancy or imprisonment'.

The Senior Youth Service Manager directed the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Members to the Caerphilly Pathways website which is designed to be a single point of contact, where information on further education and partnerships can be found.

The Scrutiny Committee Members were pleased to note that funding had been secured to employ a team of staff, known as the Inspire Team. The team has worked with a cohort of identified pupils to regain their focus on attendance, attainment and behaviour by offering bespoke one to one or small group support. From September 2023, this team will have a dedicated support officer based in each secondary school. During the 2023 school summer break, Inspire Officers supported Year 11 leavers to secure appropriate destinations in employment or training.

A Member sought clarification on the type of work the Inspire Team have carried out. The Project Coordinator for the team advised the Scrutiny Committee that the team works with a cohort of pupils that the schools have identified as pupils they feel could achieve more with the support of the Inspire Team. Each individual will have different needs; therefore, the team will identify the individual needs to create a better pathway whilst they are at school. There is a great amount of work carried out in relation to mental health needs along with school avoidance issues. Since COVID, there has been a huge increase in school avoidance, therefore the Officers use Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) training to support the individual.

With regards to mental health issues Members heard how Officers can offer support and make referrals to other agencies. Working within the School Improvement Team the Officers work with Educational Psychologists and also work with EWS and Healthy Schools.

In response to a query raised by one Member, The Strategic Lead for School Improvement advised the Scrutiny Committee, that out of the 360 pupils the team have been working with around 340 have secured destinations, but the cut-off date is the 31st October 2023. Therefore, it is hopeful that this number will improve.

Following discussion, the Scrutiny Committee considered the content of the report.

The Education and Social Service Scrutiny Committee placed on record their congratulations to all pupils for their GCSE results along with congratulations to all school staff for their very successful ESTYN reports.

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th October 2023.

CHAIR