



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 MARCH 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

E.M. Aldworth, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, P. Cook, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Gordon, T. Heron, A. Leonard, J. Roberts, J. Simmonds, S. Skivens, J. Winslade, and K. Woodland.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors C. Andrews (Education and Communities), and E. Forehead (Social Care).

Together with:

Officers: S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), G. Jenkins (Interim Director of Social Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director – Adult Services), A. West (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), A. Jones (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillors S. Morgan and J. Pritchard, and co-opted Member 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 D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), Councillor D. Cushing, and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative), Mr G. James (Parent Governor Representative), Mrs K. Cole (NEU), and 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. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH JANUARY 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 30th January 2024, be approved as a correct record, subject to noting that due to technical difficulties the meeting was not live streamed but recorded only, and a request was made that the question regarding rewards for volunteers and the response be checked against the meeting record. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 30th January 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 9) be approved as a correct record, as amended.

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. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period March 2024 to April 2024.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers, be published on the Council's website.

6. 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.

7. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING BAND B PROGRAMME – STATUTORY OBJECTION REPORT: YSGOL Y LAWNT AND UPPER RHYMNEY PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which updated Members in relation to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme in respect of the proposal to relocate Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School, through the creation of sustainable school buildings with some shared facilities.

Members were asked to consider the information contained in the Objection Report and endorse the recommendations to Cabinet, who would then make the final determination on 3rd April 2024 as to whether or not to implement the proposal following the process outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 and supporting documentation.

A Member highlighted the CADW listing on the existing Ysgol y Lawnt site and sought clarification as to its potential future use - if the new schools proceed. The Committee was advised that if the new schools go ahead, and the existing sites are declared surplus, they would be handed over to the Councils Property Services Team. In order to comply with the requirements of the Welsh Language Commissioner consideration as to whether the site has any potential Welsh Language use must be undertaken before any other proposals for the site would be considered.

Members asked for an update on other former school sites that have not yet been developed and assurance was given that an update will be provided.

A Member asked when the plans for the new schools will be available and was advised that should Cabinet approve the proposals, the next steps would be to work with Building Consultancy Team to develop them further and which includes the sustainable drainage process, Planning and Tender process, the full business case will need to be submitted to Welsh Government for approval in relation to funding. Once all this is completed the build can commence, with an anticipated completion date of September 2027.

Following consideration of the information contained in the Objection Report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to Planning Application stage and subsequent Welsh Government business case approvals.

8. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 – STATUTORY OBJECTION REPORT: PROPOSAL FOR THE CLOSURE OF CWM GLAS INFANT SCHOOL.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which updated Members in relation to the proposal in respect of the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School, effective from 20th July 2024.

Members were asked to consider the information contained in the update report and endorse the recommendations to Cabinet, who would then make the final determination on 3rd April 2024 as to whether or not to implement the proposal, following the process outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 and supporting documentation.

Members noted that there were no statutory objections received. A Member stated that the report advises that all pupils at Cwm Glas infants could be accommodated at Coed y Brain Primary school, which is an excellent school, therefore the children who will be transferring there will be well looked after.

Following consideration of the information contained in the update report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation, (and in noting there were 15 For, 0 Against, and 1 Abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to full implementation.

9. WINTER PRESSURES.

Councillor E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care) introduced the report which advised Members of annual preparations made for Winter planning as required by Welsh Government. Information was provided on the plans in place to address the pressures experienced across the health and social care system.

Members were advised that previously funding and plans have covered a 6-month period from October through to the end of March, and learning from previous years, it was agreed to plan for 2 years so that all schemes could be fully operational and evaluated properly over a longer period of time to ascertain if they had any impact on individuals and the whole system.

A Member sought clarification on whether the report was 'out of date' as reference was made to issues from October 2023. Members were advised that the report is a review at the end of the Winter season, rather than what is planned for the Winter period.

Members were also advised that data in appendix 1 relating to 'Mental Health Practitioner and WAST response' was correct at the time of publishing, however since that time, this project was now operating.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the use of Regional Integration Fund (RIF) to underpin a 2-year regional System Resilience Plan to address potential winter pressures experienced across the health and social care system.

10. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN – ANNUAL REPORT.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which informed Members of the progress made in the annual report and the Welsh Government response.

Members were advised that the report identifies positive progress towards the target for the Local Authority of 26% of year 1 learners to be in Welsh medium education by 2032, with a current percentage decrease in 2023 to 17.17% of year 1 (reception age) from 17.89% in 2016, and 17.02% of nursery from 17.95% in 2016.

Members were informed of positive feedback from Welsh Government although more information was needed to understand the current picture, and that the work developing the website pages had moved much of this information into the public domain for increased transparency.

A Member sought clarification on the decrease in numbers in Welsh medium education and whether the reasons for this were known, and also whether the views of the pupils had been obtained. Members were advised that most pupils move from Welsh Primary into Welsh Secondary education, however, the main challenge is to increase the numbers going into year 1 (reception age). Members were also advised that Covid had a major impact on Welsh medium education with non-Welsh speaking parents concerned about online learning at that time, although some pupils have since returned to Welsh medium education.

A Member sought clarification on the opportunities available out of school, delivered by the youth service, and to what extent these opportunities could be provided County wide. Members were advised that out of school activities need to be sufficient and there is an increase due in some areas of the Borough with regards to childcare provision and after school clubs. Members were also advised that a Welsh medium parent/toddler group had formed from the parent network involved with Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhydney Primary School, with more groups expected to be set up in the future.

A Member queried the decrease in the numbers for year 1 (reception age) and whether the targets were still achievable in the next 8 years. Members were advised that work was being done with health colleagues to confirm numbers going forward in relation to population, together with work being done with promotion and marketing of current surplus places in Welsh medium schools. Reference was also made to the proposed new development for Ysgol Y Lawnt which would also increase the surplus places available. Members were also advised that consideration would be required for the workforce development to increase, as the provision of Welsh medium pupils increased.

A Member sought clarification on the increase of provisions in place for children with additional learning needs and queried the current provision. The Member also queried whether all teaching roles were being filled in Welsh medium schools. Members were advised that there is a specialist resource base for ALN at Cwm Derwen, and there are plans to have another base at Cwm Gwyddon. Members were also informed that the required increase in the workforce development is challenging and includes a lot of training and specialist support to allow teachers the opportunity to learn Welsh.

A Member noted the 80% take up in the Flying Start provision and queried how this could be increased further. Members were advised that some parents do not realise that they live in specific areas where this is available, and advertising on social media and the Caerphilly Early Years website will hopefully see an increase in attendance, going forward.

At the Chairs' request, Members were shown an animation film which had been produced to encourage learning for pupils, in the medium of Welsh. The Chair thanked the Officer for their contribution and also wished to note thanks to the youth worker who had assisted 2 young persons to attain their Welsh qualifications.

A Member noted the reduction in the financial support for Welsh language and whether all the targets in the report were still achievable going forward. Members were advised that the changes to grants were currently being considered together with the school budgets that had been set.

The Scrutiny Committee received the report and commented on the progress made in the first year of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

The Chair wished to note thanks to Officers for arranging the recent Members visit to the new school at Cwm Gwyddon. An invitation was also noted for an event at Crosskeys College on 13th March 2024, which members were welcome to attend.

The meeting closed at 6.29 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 20th May 2024.

CHAIR