



## **EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 5.30PM**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor T. Parry - Chair  
Councillor C. Andrews - Vice-Chair

#### **Councillors:**

E. A. Aldworth, C. Cuss, W. David, A. Farina-Childs, D.T. Hardacre, D. Havard, M.P. James, B. Miles, Mrs G.D. Oliver, J. Roberts and J. Simmonds.

Councillor R. Whiting (Cabinet Member for Learning and Achievement).

#### **Together with:**

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), A. West (21st Century Schools Manager), J. Lougher (Sport & Leisure Development Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

#### **Also Present:**

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mrs P.J. Ireland (NEU) and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative).

I. Elliott (Headteacher of Trinity Fields Special School and Resource Centre).

A. Tucknutt (Headteacher of Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon).

#### **1. WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed new and returning Members and Officers to the meeting and introduced the newly appointed Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement, Councillor R. Whiting to his first Education Scrutiny Committee meeting.

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.J. Bevan and A. Collis.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**4. MINUTES – 24TH FEBRUARY 2020**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday the 24th February 2020 (minute nos 1- 11) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**5. 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.

**6. EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined the draft Education Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme from September to November 2020. Members were asked to consider the work programme and make any amendments or propose any additional items to be included for future meetings.

Members discussed the report and questioned if the reports that were originally scheduled for Scrutiny Meetings earlier in the year that were not held due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, should be added to the Forward Work Programme for future meetings. It was suggested that some reports which have been written could be circulated to Members by way of information items and if any concerns were raised at that point they could be brought on to future agenda's for consideration. Members were asked to contact the Scrutiny Officer following the meeting to suggest which reports should be prioritised and circulated.

Following consideration and discussion, Members unanimously agreed that subject to the following, the Forward Work Programme appended to the report be published on the Council's website:

RESOLVED that the Education Scrutiny Committee scheduled for the 3rd November 2020 be moved to Thursday 26th November 2020. This will allow Officers sufficient time to prepare a report in respect of the outcome of Phase 1 of the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Band B Programme - Consultation in respect of Trinity Fields Special School and Resource Centre and Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon, as the consultation period ends on the 26th October 2020.

**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. 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES BAND B PROGRAMME - CONSULTATION IN RESPECT OF TRINITY FIELDS SPECIAL SCHOOL AND RESOURCE CENTRE AND YSGOL GYMRAEG CWM GWYDDON**

The report sought to officially consult with and obtain the views of Members in respect of the Band B Phase 1 proposals for the expansion of provision at Trinity Fields Special School and

Resource Centre and relocation and expansion of Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon onto the former Cwmcarn High site. It was noted that the consultation period for both proposals commenced on the 14th September 2020 and will end on the 26th October 2020. Both schemes were presented separately to the Scrutiny Committee.

Members were advised that the 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme is a major, long-term, strategic capital investment programme. It is jointly funded by the Welsh Government and Local Authorities and aims to create a generation of 21st century schools in Wales. The key aims of the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Band B investment programme outlined by Welsh Government, were set out as follows:

- Reduce the number of poor condition schools;
- Ensure that the Council has the right size schools in the right location, providing enough places to deliver Welsh and English medium education;
- Ensure the effective and efficient use of the educational estate for use by both Schools and the wider Community.

The proposal in relation to Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon was outlined by an Officer. The proposal currently being consulted on, is to relocate the school to a new purpose-built Welsh-medium provision school to incorporate a primary facility with childcare, special resource base, nursery and rising 3 provision. The school is proposed to be situated on the former Cwmcarn High school site to enable inclusive delivery of the curriculum in a stimulating 21st Century environment. The new facility will support community use and promote the use of the Welsh language.

The Officer outlined the rationale for the proposal for Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon, including the condition of the existing school, projected demand, impact on other schools, Estyn inspection, catchment and the realisation of the requirements of Caerphilly's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan objectives. Full details are available in the Consultation Documentation produced as part of the consultation process and available electronically and in hard copy on request.

The proposal in relation to Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre was outlined by an Officer. The proposal is to expand the existing school through a new building extension and outdoor play space to provide additional facilities to accommodate growing demand for places, specialist intervention areas and outdoor play space. The facility will also provide additional resources available for community use. The views of the children at the school have been incorporated into the proposal.

The Officer outlined the rationale for the proposal for Trinity Fields School. The school is the only school in the Borough that caters for pupils from 3 – 19 with a wide range of special educational needs and requirements. The new facility will house flexible spaces to support pupils with unique and innovative features to enhance skills to further assist the Authority in meeting the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs Act. Full details are available in the Consultation Documentation produced as part of the consultation process and available electronically and in hard copy on request.

It was explained that as part of the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code 2018 and Section 42/44 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, proposals must be published when the Council make a 'regulated alteration' to a maintained or Special school respectively. A consultation must be undertaken with Members and wider Stakeholders as identified and outlined in the Code. The views of pupils are being sought through the support of the school as a key consultee group and will be incorporated into the Consultation Report. Once the consultation period concludes on the 26th October 2020, a consultation report for each proposal, summarising the views of consultees will be brought back to Scrutiny and then presented to Cabinet for consideration. Cabinet will then take the decision as to whether to proceed with the proposal, amend the proposal or not to progress with the

proposal. Should Cabinet decide to proceed, individual Statutory Notices will be published providing a 28-day notice period for objections. It was noted that the current consultation process was to provide views on the proposals, they are not objections at this stage. Members were advised that The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal, has the opportunity to do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections must be made in writing and sent to the Council within the notice period. Formal responses can only be registered following the publication of a statutory notice.

Members welcomed Ms A. Tucknutt (Headteacher of Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon) and Mr I. Elliott (Headteacher of Trinity Fields Special School and Resource Centre) to the meeting. They both briefly outlined the proposals in respect of their Schools and the positive impact this would have on pupil wellbeing. Both Heads highlighted the excellent Estyn inspection each respective school had received across all 5 inspection areas and how the pupils have been involved in developing the proposals. Mr I. Elliott also confirmed how the additional 80 places had been identified. The Committee watched the Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon video which had been produced as part of the consultation process. Due to technical issues, the Trinity Fields School video was unable to be shown and it was agreed that it would be circulated to all members after the meeting. The videos showed enthusiastic staff and pupils introducing their schools and highlighted the benefits the Band B Phase 1 proposals could bring, in addition to statements by key partners who would also benefit from the proposals.

Members discussed the report and the consultation process and questioned if the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic had affected the plans in relation to planning for future school provision. In addition, if the consultation process had been adapted in terms of full engagement with all stakeholders, given the current constraints. Another Member queried why at least 1 or 2 face to face meetings could not be held with the community and local ward Members to allow an opportunity for engagement where people can ask questions rather than put them in writing. The Officer clarified that there are no plans to change the design of the buildings set out in the proposals as a result of Covid-19. In relation to the consultation process, Officers had intended to commence the consultation process in May 2020 so there has been a delay with this process. Whilst face to face meetings with stakeholders, including parents, governors, members of staff and the community had been considered, there is no requirement to undertake consultation in this way as per the requirements of the School Organisation Code. In light of the Covid-19 guidelines developed by Welsh Government on social distancing, the consultation has been carried out through a written process. In addition, this week the 21st Century Schools Team set up a 'Question and Answer' session for all stakeholders to access and all the Q and A's will be published on the 21st Century Schools Website. All stakeholders have previously been directed to this website to access all available information in relation to the consultation. It was also confirmed that copies of the consultation document in Welsh and English can be accessed on-line and hard copies made available on request.

A Member sought clarification regarding the position of satellite provision with classes in mainstream schools and whether the long term plans were to bring them back into Trinity Fields School following the proposed extension. The Headteacher confirmed that Caerphilly is in a unique position in that the special school is at one end of the spectrum and the satellite classroom within the mainstream school at the other end. Parents like this option and it also increases the capacity within the school and they would not be brought back into Trinity Fields School itself as this would be regarded a disservice to the pupils. The full detail is set out in the Consultation document.

A member, expressed support for the expansion of Trinity Fields School but also raised concerns about some of the arrangements proposed for Penallta Rugby Club in relation to the Trinity Fields expansion and if Penallta Rugby Club had been informally consulted prior to the publication of the consultation document. The member also queried if the consultation documentation was available in hardcopy as not everyone had online access. The Member proposed that another pitch at the site of the Rugby Club (currently used as a practice pitch) could be brought up to league standard and would require a small piece of land from Trinity

Fields to achieve this. Officers clarified that discussions started with the Rugby Club in November 2019, they met again in March 2020 and then in July 2020 when a copy of the business case was provided setting out the background of the project. Emails have also been exchanged and an ongoing dialogue with updates during the process. Officers highlighted that the majority of the first team plays at the Centre of Excellence. Officers looked at the dimensions of the practice pitch, locally known as Trinity 2 and the flooding issues with the low-lying pitch. Advice was sought about building up the pitch however this would not gain planning consent. The Council's proposal therefore is to bring the Sue Noakes pitch up to first team standard which is in walking distance of the Rugby Club. The youth team in Penallta are already using this pitch. Based on the information provided on the issue of flooding, the Member withdrew his proposed additional recommendation. Officers also confirmed that the Consultation information had been publicised widely and that on the front of the document, it states that information can be made available in Welsh, English, other languages and hard copy on request.

A Member, although supporting the expansion of Trinity Fields School raised a number of concerns in relation to the affect this will have on the community. He questioned why other sites had not been considered when the school numbers are increasing and suggested that a larger school should be built on another site to future proof the school. The member also highlighted concerns over historical building in the area and stated that there were over 1000 objections currently lodged against this proposal.

Mr I Elliott confirmed how the pupil numbers were calculated, looking at trends across Wales. It was clarified that Trinity Fields School is not only an education provision but links in very closely with health and social services. The Headteacher explained how the future proofing of numbers have been projected and why the expansion of the existing school was the preferred option. He emphasised that Trinity Fields is unique to Caerphilly and the community is the whole of the borough.

Officers provided clarification regarding the statement concerning the objections. The source of the information was not made clear. The Consultation period was still in the early stage, the Officer stated that views had been submitted both in support and opposed to the proposal, but the number quoted by the member had not been reflected in what had been received to date.

A further concern was also raised in relation to the usage and allocation of use at the Centre of Excellence and that the Sue Noakes pitch is at least a 20 to 25 minute walk from Penallta. Officers confirmed that the Centre of Excellence does have a ranked booking system, agreed by Cabinet in consultation with the Welsh Rugby Union and the Welsh Football Trust. There is criteria for the allocation and Penallta RFC have weekly bookings since the centre opened. Whilst the Sue Noakes location may not be the clubs preferred location at present, the youth team currently utilise the site.

A member queried as to whether the risk assessment carried out as part of the proposal would ensure that a sustainable drainage solution would be developed to prevent localised flooding. Officers confirmed that the planning process would incorporate a sustainable solution designed to the current SABs standards and National Resources Wales would be consulted as is the case for any development in the Borough for anything over 100 square metres.

In concluding, a number of Members referred to individual circumstances when they had attended Trinity Fields school and how fundamental and impressive this facility is within the County Borough. They reflected that whilst Penallta RFC may be affected and that further discussions were needed to seek a way forward, the proposal to extend the school as outlined is an opportunity for partnership working and in supporting the most vulnerable children.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report and discussed at the meeting, it was moved and seconded and unanimously agreed that the vote in respect of each school would be taken separately:

- i. it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in respect of Trinity Fields Special School and Resource Centre be approved and in noting there were 12 in favour and 1 against, this was agreed by the majority present;
- ii. it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in respect of Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon be approved and this was unanimously agreed.

## 9. FULL RETURN TO SCHOOL SEPTEMBER 2020

The Chief Education Officer delivered a presentation which provided details on how the Education Department and schools have reacted and adapted during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Committee were reminded that the schools' closure was announced on Wednesday, 18th March, 2020 for Friday, 20th March. Within days the FSM strategy was agreed and implemented and approximately 1,000 applications for childcare for key workers was processed. 6 mainstream hubs and 1 ALN base was established with a further 4 mainstream additional hubs and 2 vulnerable pupil hubs where over 1,700 staff contributed to this process.

Schools re-opened on Monday, 29th June, 2020, in order to check in, catch up and prepare - with a maximum of 1/3 capacity of pupils. Risk Assessments (RAs) were completed for all school sites and staff and pupils who are vulnerable. The Local Authority issued guidance and weekly meetings with headteachers continued.

Between June and September, weekly meetings were held with Internal officers to revise guidance and weekly meetings were also held with Trade Unions to consult upon any changes to the guidance. Meetings with headteachers continued through the summer into the autumn with new Local Authority guidance drafted and advice and support provided for revision of RAs for site and staff. Catering and cleaning arrangements continued to be reviewed but all pupils would bring a packed lunch until 1.10.2020.

The expectations for September 2020 were to continue the delivery of FSM until the 30th September 2020 and that Tuesday 1st and Wednesday 2nd September 2020 be designated planning days to enable Risk Assessments to be updated. Pupils would begin to return in groups from 3rd September so that all pupils would return from Monday 14th September and Schools would establish business continuity plans.

The Officer summarised the support that has been offered to schools which included:

- Advice and support for site and individual Risk Assessments.
- LA Guidance regularly updated to include processes, e.g. test, trace and protect.
- Frequent communication and access to advice and support.
- Guest Wi-fi in all schools.
- Ed tech programme.
- Funding for text books for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Face coverings policy and distribution.
- Accelerated Learning Funding.

In concluding, the Officer set out what have been the most challenging aspects for schools. These included ensuring social distancing and minimising contact between groups, the Track, Trace and Protect process and managing anxiety. Also, Catering solutions, including breakfast clubs from 1st October 2020.

The Chair expressed her enormous admiration to all the Local Authority staff, Headteachers and school staff for their hard work in the planning and preparation for all the work undertaken, including facilitating the school hubs and free school meals. Committee Members commended the Chief Education Officer and her Team for the clear guidance provided to schools throughout

and to all Headteachers who've also worked incredibly hard. A Member asked how safeguarding had been monitored during this period. Officers have worked closely with Social Services and Mr I. Elliott to identify vulnerable pupils and prioritising the needs of those pupils and arranging placements at Trinity Fields where necessary. Officers work closely with schools monitoring all vulnerable children. The Youth Service and Education Service have also maintained links with their groups throughout and the Officer confirmed there has been an outstanding team effort across the board.

The Chair thanked the Officer for delivering the presentation and responding to queries raised and the Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the presentation.

The meeting closed at 8:20pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2020 they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR