



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON 29TH NOVEMBER 2012 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor D.W.R. Preece - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

H.R. Davies, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D. Havard, D. Havard, Mrs G.D. Oliver, D. Rees, J.E. Roberts, Mrs M.E. Sargent.

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: Mrs R. Passmore

Cabinet Member for Performance and Management: D.T. Hardacre

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Corporate Director Education and Lifelong Learning), B. Hopkins (Assistant Director, Our Schools Our Future, 21st Century Schools, K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion), S. Richards (Planning and Strategy), L. Travis (Interim Manager Community Education) G. Evans (Senior Manager Library Services), R. Roberts (Manager Performance Management Unit), E. Lewis (Planning and Strategy) C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and E. Sullivan (Committee Services Officer).

Co-opted Members: Mr T. Crosse (Cardiff ROC), Mr A. Farina Childs (Parent Governor), Mrs A. Goss (Parent Governor), Mrs P. Ireland (NUT), Mr J. Short (NASUWT) and Mr P. Jones (NAHT)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.J. Bevan, W. David, D.M. Gray, M.P. James, G. Johnston, J. Pritchard, R. Saralis, Mr T. Cross, Mrs J. Havard (NUT) and Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT)

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor D.W. Preece presided as Chairman for the meeting.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received and the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports: -

2. INTRODUCTION TO IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

The Performance Manager introduced the Improvement Objective (IO4) for Education and Lifelong Learning and gave an overview of the monitoring process and scrutiny's role within it.

3. SIX MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 4 (2012-2013)

The report detailed the performance data and action plan for delivering improvement objective IO4, improving the skills levels for children and young people.

The outcomes for IO4 were confirmed and Members noted that continued progress had been made on the Key Stage 3 Core Subject Indicator with Caerphilly's ranking within Wales rising to 18th. At Key Stage 4 the Core Subject Indicator had also risen from 41.8% to 43% however the percentage gap between boys and girls had not achieved the target, but the data was consistent with the cohort of pupils assessed.

The performance of indicators for the percentage of young people achieving Level 1 and Level 2 threshold were noted to be below the anticipated result and this was due to the underperformance of a small number of schools that detracted from the improvements made. Officer's confirmed that the EAS had been fully briefed and support would be provided to schools.

The Chair thanked the Officer's for their report and full discussion ensued.

Members requested that previous cohort figures along with national data on the percentage gap be included in future data, to enable them to make more accurate comparisons with regard to performance. Officers agreed to take this forward and would include the data if possible.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made on Improvement Objective 1 for 2012 and 2013.

4. INTRODUCTION BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning introduced the evaluation of performance for the 6-month period from April 2012 to September 2012 and included evaluation against improvement plans and the performance indicators for individual service areas.

5. DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING - 6 MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE (2012-2013)

The report detailed the progress made on improvement plans and key performance data for the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning.

The Directorate priorities for 2012-2013 were confirmed, updates from each of the different service areas were received and the progress made against each were noted.

Priority 1 indicators were detailed and Officers outlined those areas that went well and those that required improvement.

Members were pleased to note the positive progress made in relation to sport and leisure services in the development of the Smartcard and Quest accreditation and noted that this indicator now lies with the Directorate of the Environment.

Officers advised that management information systems and quality assurance processes between the local authority and EAS were in place, system leaders had been allocated and progress would continue to be reviewed and monitored. The EAS had been fully briefed on the Skills Strategy and the development of good communication links had seen a positive impact. It was noted that skills around numeracy required further development, especially at Key Stage 3 and a review of interventions would be undertaken in order to ensure that the right support was delivered.

Officer's confirmed that a Project Manager had been appointed to review the provision for pupils with additional learning needs. It was envisaged that this piece of work would be completed within the next school term and recommendations would be brought forward to the Scrutiny Committee in due course.

The Director of Education confirmed that a full curriculum review of provision for pupils aged 14 to 19 had been undertaken and was now subject to a period of consultation. The outcome of this would be used to inform the way forward and ensure an inclusive curriculum, which promoted progression through an appropriate range of learning pathways. It was confirmed that 14-19 responsibilities would transfer to the EAS and a further report would be presented to Scrutiny prior to this taking place.

Priority 2 indicators were detailed and Officers outlined those areas that went well and those that required improvement.

Officer's confirmed a new management information system had been purchased in Community Education, which had a greater compatibility with the Ffynnon system and partner agencies. This improved the accuracy of data informing Ffynnon and would be used to inform the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) from January 2013.

The Priority 2 indicator for Library Services was detailed and Members noted that 'New Library' improvement plans had been established and were working well in Bargoed, Blackwood and Risca. Members noted the increase in book and non-book borrowing across all three sites. A consultation process with young people on library services had been undertaken and would be used to inform services going forward. Officers advised that targeted training and support for frontline staff had been commissioned in order to develop a more retail orientated service and this would be a priority over the next quarter.

Members noted that Risca Palace was the only Hub where 70% or more of its loans and returns were being channelled through the self-service kiosks. Officer's identified this as an area for development and would be working to inspire customer confidence in the new technology and increase take-up.

Clarification was sought as to whether this increase in take-up had been noted in other areas and Officer's confirmed that there had been a 15% increase across all library sites.

Clarification was also sought in relation to the extent of the consultation process with young people and Members expressed the concern that hard to reach young people were not being included. Officers acknowledged that there was always more that could be done in terms consultation and would look at using outreach and caseworkers as well as 'Street Teams' in order to be as inclusive as possible during the consultation process.

The progress of the Youth Service information management system was detailed and Members noted the service had moved closer to the adoption of a single system that would provide less time consuming and more appropriate data collection.

Members expressed concern that this priority had not progressed further and Officer's advised that a group had been established to look at all data systems and progress was being made.

The progress made in aligning internal peer assessment processes with ESTYN CIF and Youth Support Services were noted and Members were advised that improvements and been made in line with the CYPP and the establishment of the Single Plan.

The Priority 2 indicators for 21st Century Schools were detailed and Members noted the improvements made in upgrading welfare facilities in schools, and the progress on the St Ilan project. It was noted that Cwm Ifor Primary had opened two months late and this had highlighted the need to factor in slippage risks in future project programmes.

Clarification was sought in relation to surplus places and Members and Officer's fully discussed the options and targets for 2015. Officers confirmed that capacity in secondary schools was currently under review and would look at how a school can be more productively used within a community. However Officers were mindful that any initiatives considered should not impact on the viability of the school itself. Members noted that further reports on surplus places would be brought forward at a future meeting.

The progress made in the recording Free School Meal entitlements was detailed and Members noted the increase in take up in the last two years. The impact of this on the categorisation of schools re performance and the delivery of £1M to the Council was emphasised. Officer's confirmed that by working in partnership with the Housing Benefit Team, awareness of the free school meal entitlement was being raised but there was still a core of parents not claiming. Members expressed the concern that the stigma attached to free school meals provision may still be preventing parents from applying and options for addressing this issue were discussed at length. It was noted that the cashless payment system operating in secondary schools had gone a long way to eliminating this, but the system was not yet available in all schools.

Members requested that a report detailing the cost implications of rolling out the cashless system to all schools be brought forward at a future meeting.

The progress made in terms of Service Improvement Plans and Key Performance Indicators was noted and Members were pleased to note that joint scrutiny arrangements with the EAS had been initiated. The role of Governors on the Joint Scrutiny Panels was discussed at length and the Scrutiny Research Officer agreed to take Members comments forward.

Priority 3 indicators were detailed and Officers outlined those areas that went well and those that required improvement.

The progress made in developing the range of provision within Adult Basic Education was detailed. The success in securing Families First funding and a 10% increase in the number of classes delivered across the borough was noted. Members were advised that further training needed to be developed in order to up-skill tutors in the recognition of basic skills needs.

Members requested that the actual numbers of learners enrolled be included on future reports together with a list of the courses run. Officer's confirmed that this would be taken on board for future meetings.

ESF projects had been effective in supporting learners and to date all programmes had met their targets and overachieved with regard to the number of adults engaged and the number of qualifications gained. Members were pleased to note that over 3% over those enrolled on the work programme and 5% of those on the Bridges to Work initiative moved into work.

The Essential Skills in the Workplace project was discussed and Members were advised that the current economic climate had impacted on the ability of employers to get classes started, however Officer's continued to work closely with them to ensure delivery and positive outcomes for learners.

Members were updated on the Priority 3 indicator for Library Services and noted those libraries under renovation and those newly opened. Legal negotiations for Caerphilly Town Library had concluded and work has commenced on the construction phase. Officers confirmed that the project would take a year to complete. Grant applications for Fochriw Community Centre had been submitted and further information from the awarding bodies was required before progress could be made.

An update on the development, delivery and maintenance of facilities and activities that encourage more people to become more active more often was received. Members were advised that responsibility for this indicator now lay with the Directorate of the Environment. Members noted the positive engagement opportunities and the successes of the Dragon Sports programme. Significant increases in membership had been noted following the Olympics and the Children's University had been very well received. The success of the Millennium Volunteers initiative was recognised with 2 volunteers and 1 member of staff nominated for the Sport Wales, Coach of the Year Award.

The use of the SMART card in tracking credits for the different projects was discussed at length and its use within Youth Clubs was fully debated. Members noted that SMART cards were not compulsory and young people could access facilities without signing up for a card.

The scorecards for each service area detailing their individual objectives and targets were detailed. Members noted previous targets, the position at the six-month review and the proposed targets for 2012/2013. Officer's advised that positive feedback had been received on the 'Starting School' booklet and although the percentage of unfilled Secondary School places had increased the percentage in Primary Schools had decreased and this position would continue to be monitored.

Members attention was drawn to gaps in the Learning, Education and Inclusion score card and Officers confirmed that some data was still outstanding and once received a further report would be brought forward.

The Director of Education asked that Members forward any comments they had on the Directorate Improvement Plans or the performance data presented to Officers to be used to inform future performance management meetings.

The Scrutiny Committee having fully considered the report noted the 6-month progress update for the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Members thanked Officers for the detail of the reports presented and for the time and effort taken in their preparation.

The meeting closed at 19:06 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2013, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN