



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER 2013 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, H.R. Davies, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D.M. Gray, D. Havard, G. Johnston,
Mrs. G.D. Oliver and R. Saralis.

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: Mrs. R. Passmore.

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion), J. Garland (Service Manager Social Inclusion), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Co-opted Members: Mr. M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan), Mr. A. Farina-Childs (Parent Governor) and Mrs. A. Goss (Parent Governor).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.P. James and Mrs. M.E. Sargent and from Mrs S. Evans (Caerphilly Governors Association) and P Ireland (NUT)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

2. MINUTES – 24TH SEPTEMBER 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee held on 24th September 2013 (minute nos. 1-14, on page nos. 1-5) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

4. CABINET REPORTS

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

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LEISURE

Councillor Mrs. R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Life Long Learning, gave a verbal report and informed Members that an Estyn Monitoring visit took place on 9-10 October 2013. Following the inspection of Education Services for children and young people in July 2012, the authority was identified as requiring follow up through Estyn monitoring. A monitoring plan was subsequently agreed with the Estyn Link Inspectors and the first monitoring visit took place in October.

Members noted that the Inspectors had reviewed the progress made by the Authority against three of the five recommendations arising from the previous inspection, to consider the current performance of the authority and to identify any further areas for improvement. A further monitoring visit is scheduled to evaluate progress against the remaining two recommendations and will also review the overall progress made against all recommendation from the previous inspection and current performance overall.

Councillor Passmore detailed the outcome of the Monitoring Visit and advised that the authority has prioritised the actions needed to improve its education services for children and young people. Elected Members and senior officers are committed to taking difficult decisions to improve provision and make effective use of resources.

With regards to Recommendation 3: improve the robustness of self-evaluation and target setting, since the previous inspection in 2012 the local authority has made good progress in addressing this recommendation. It has developed appropriate self-evaluation and target setting process within the education and lifelong learning directorate.

In relation to Recommendation 4: align corporate and partnership strategic planning processes in order to make best use of available resources to improve outcomes for children and young people. The authority has made good progress in bringing about improvements in planning processes at Corporate and Directorate levels.

Estyn have also advised that with regards to Recommendation 5: take urgent action to reduce surplus capacity in schools generally and secondary schools in particular. Since the inspection, the local authority has made good progress in relation to the need to reduce surplus capacity in its primary and secondary schools.

Members thanked Councillor Mrs. R. Passmore for the information and were pleased to note the progress made.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. AGENDA SUMMARY

The Scrutiny Committee noted the proposed agenda for the meeting.

7. PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS RECOMMENDATIONS WITHIN THE POST INSPECTION ACTION PLAN (PIAP)

The report outlined the progress made towards meeting the recommendations within the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) and how it is monitored by Estyn. The quality of Caerphilly Local Authority's education services for children and young people was inspected in July 2012 and was carried out in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Following publication of the report in November 2012, a PIAP was produced and sent to Estyn for approval. The plan was approved in March 2013 and progress has been reported to Members of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet since this time.

Members were informed that the letter, as per the Cabinet Members update, has now superseded certain items in the report. Members were informed that EAS has developed a Quality Assurance Framework for meeting recommendations 1 and 2, the outcome of which will be available in January 2014, and no further comments will be available until then. In relation to Recommendations 3, 4 and 5, progress reports and supporting evidence were prepared by the authority, which was submitted to Estyn during the monitoring visit on the 9th October 2013. In addition to the evidence supplied, Inspectors interviewed members, officers and head teachers in order to confirm the impact of actions taken. Officers were encouraged by the comments made by Estyn and felt that cross directorate working has been effective.

Members discussed the Quality Assurance Framework and who has ownership of the Framework. Officers confirmed that the document is available to share and that the process requires time to embed. EAS have ownership of the Framework, however it will be the role of the Local Authority to hold EAS to account.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report.

8. IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The report informed Members of the progress made in improving attendance in schools within the County Borough. Members were informed that during the academic year 2012/13 there was a slight increase in both Primary and Secondary school attendance in comparison with the previous year. There remains evidence of a strong correlation between poor attendance and those children and young people eligible for Free School Meals, as indicated in the National Statistics First Release Absenteeism from Secondary Schools in Wales 2012/13. Improving attendance remains a priority for the Local Authority and is a target in the Learning Education and Inclusion Service Improvement Plan. Members were provided with a supporting presentation to accompany the report outlining the statistics that confirm the increase in school attendance.

Members discussed the report and presentation and officers informed Members that balanced support is available to pupils and schools, provided by Education Welfare Officers, which is targeted and categorised appropriately and fairly. Members queried the statistics and ranking across Wales. Concerns were raised at the impact inclement weather has on the attendance statistics. Officers confirmed that this is an issue and that this debate will need to be brought to All Wales meetings for consideration.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

9. REDUCING EXCLUSIONS

The report and supporting presentation updated Members on the progress made in relation to exclusions from schools within the County Borough. The Local Authority (LA) works with schools and other partners to ensure a robust approach towards the reduction of exclusions. During 2011/12, the need to reduce exclusions became an urgent priority and has continued to be a focus in all key areas. Members were informed that there have been no permanent exclusions issued in primary schools for two consecutive years. Since 2007/08, the downward trend in the number of permanent exclusions in secondary schools has been maintained. There has been a decrease in the number of fixed term exclusions as well as the number of days lost due to all exclusions. However, the number of fixed term exclusions of 6 days or more and the number of days lost due to fixed term exclusions of 6 days or more, is a cause for concern and a priority for the LA.

Members were informed that work is ongoing to develop guidance for schools and responses have been good, which is evidenced in the lack of permanent exclusions in primary schools and of the 14 secondary schools, only 2 issued permanent exclusions. The Key Performance Indicator, Fixed term exclusions have seen a decrease.

Members discussed the data in the report and queried the support provided to schools and teaching staff and in particular those who are dealing with problematic pupils. Officers informed Members that there is a structure in place, with Education Welfare Officers, Educational Psychologist and Behaviour Specialists to offer support and advice to schools, pupils and families in order to find the best option for them. Strategies for support and intervention are in place within schools to deal with pupils and prevent exclusions. However, Members were also assured that schools are not being pressurised to avoid exclusion, if it is the appropriate action.

Members queried the effectiveness of Managed Moves, where a pupil is given a fresh start at an alternative establishment. Officers stated that the team works with the school and family to ensure that the experience is a positive one. In the majority of cases, the Managed Move option has been positive.

The Chair thanked Jacqui Garland for the informative report and presentations and complimented the work being done.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

10. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Details contained in the forward work programme were received and noted.

11. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE PLACED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

There were no requests for items received to be placed on the next available agenda.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. There were no items brought forward for review.

1. Summary of Members' Attendance - Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 - 9th May 2013 to 30th September 2013.

The meeting closed at 6.01p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 14th January 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN