



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 8TH APRIL 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

Mrs. A. Blackman, H.R. Davies, C. Gordon, M.P. James, G. Johnston, Mrs G.D. Oliver, J. Pritchard, R. Saralis and Mrs M. Sargent

Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning: Mrs R. Passmore.

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion), Linda Travis (Senior Community Education Manager), J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

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

Also Present: Mr E. Pryce (Education Achievement Service)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.J. Bevan, C. Durham, D.M. Gray, D. Havard, J.E. Roberts and A. Goss (Parent Governor Representative)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES – 6TH MARCH 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee held on 6th March 2014 (minute nos. 1-12, on page nos. 1-6) 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 LIFELONG LEARNING

Councillor Mrs R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning provided Members with a verbal update on the progress made against the Estyn Inspection and expressed gratitude on behalf of the Council, to the Interim Deputy Chief Executive and all the staff involved for their hard work in implementing the Inspectorate's recommendations.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that, since opening on 6th January 2014, Caerphilly Library and Customer Service Centre had welcomed 56,979 visitors, making it the busiest facility of its kind in the County Borough. The new facility had also received critical acclaim, achieving the BREEAM 'Very Good' rating for the environmental credentials, which include energy saving solar panels, an efficient design with highly insulated walls, floors and roof and energy-conscious lighting and heating systems throughout.

Members were provided with an update on the Young Musician of the Year Competition 2014. Over 100 students, aged between 11 and 18, from the County Borough took part in the Competition. Students competed in preliminary classes throughout the day and overall winners of each class progressed to the evening's final to perform before a distinguished and knowledgeable audience. The winner of the Young Musician of the Year 2014 was awarded to Eluned Hollyman from Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni and the award for the Young Composer of the Year 2014 was awarded to Abigail Birkinshaw, a student at Lewis Girls' School.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. NATIONAL MODEL FOR REGIONAL WORKING ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT;

The Interim Deputy Chief Executive presented Members with an overview of the report, which detailed the developments in relation to the new National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement (The National Model).

The Hill Review identified a number of recommendations for improving the delivery and structure of education improvement services in Wales. One of the recommendations identified the need for greater consistency in the governance structure of regional education consortia responsible for delivering school improvement services.

The National Model proposed a Joint Committee and an Executive Board. The Joint Committee would have certain high level decision making responsibilities while all other responsibilities were delegated to an Executive Board who will have operational responsibility for overseeing, supporting and challenging the EAS.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning was invited to comment on The National Model and added that, the Welsh Government (WG) supported the new National Model, and as a result local authorities had to implement the new arrangements.

Members thanked the Officer and Cabinet Member and a debate ensued in which Members expressed their concerns that the National Model appeared to be an initial step to removing responsibility for Education from local authorities.

A Member sought clarification around the financial arrangements and the allocation of the RSG Funding, along with an explanation of the remuneration requirements associated with the Model. The Officer stated that the RSG Funding was forwarded from local authorities to the EAS, within an agreed formula; however, the agreed formulae meant an additional allocation of £100,000 for the year 2014/15. Members were assured that the Panels, proposed within the National Model, would only receive travelling expenses.

Members expressed concerns in relation to the proposals for the governance arrangements and membership of the Joint Committee and Executive Board. The Officer outlined that these concerns had already been made to Welsh Government, highlighting that work was required to ensure the current governance arrangements for EAS were aligned to the proposals in the National Model. Legal advice had been sought.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report and noted the new National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement, which would be considered at Cabinet on 8th April 2014.

7. REDUCED FUNDING FOR ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING 2014-2014;

L. Travis, Senior Community Education Manager provided Members with an overview of the report, which informed Members that Adult Community Learning is facing significant reductions to the budget in 2014/15 academic year. The report highlighted that the current reduction is to the amount of £134,552 for 2014/15.

A full discussion of the report ensued with Members debating the impact on vulnerable groups undertaking non-statutory training and queried the impacts on the staff within the service. The Officer clarified that there have been some restrictions imposed on funding by Welsh Government and, therefore, cost recovery on courses may be required. Discussions are underway with Social Services to consider options to mitigate the impact of the cuts on vulnerable groups.

Members noted the report and agreed that a further report, highlighting the impacts to the staff and users of Adult Community Learning Service would be presented to the Committee when further budgetary information is made available from the Welsh Government and franchise partners.

8. NATIONAL READING AND NUMERACY TESTS 2013.

E. Pryce (Education Achievement Service) presented a report on the final published results of Caerphilly Schools' 2013 performance, in the new National Reading and Numeracy tests implemented by all schools for pupils in year groups 2-9.

The New National Reading and Numeracy (procedural) Tests were introduced in 2013 and the Welsh Government defined the results for the first year of these tests as 'experimental statistics' to reflect the nature of the tests and the data collection processes.

Members considered the Performance data provided and queried the work in schools to raise the standards of reading and numeracy. Officers clarified that work is underway between schools and the EAS to offer intervention support to pupils and teachers, which is tracked and monitored to ensure the appropriate levels of intervention and support are in place.

The “disapplied” criteria for the National Reading and Numeracy Test was highlighted to Members and it was noted that the EAS had undertaken an exercise to check that all pupils that should have taken part in the tests had done so.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

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

Cllr. D.W.R. Preece requested a report on how the progress of “vulnerable” children within the borough is tracked and the outcomes of interventions made.

10. 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. Key Stage 4 Pupil Performance 2013;
2. Welsh Government Report: Local Authority Services Performance 2012/13.

The meeting closed at 19.08p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 4th June 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN