



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 8TH JULY 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chair

Councillors:

Mrs A. Blackman, H.R. Davies, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D.M. Gray, D. Havard, M.P. James, Mrs G.D. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece, J.E. Roberts and R. Saralis.

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), G. Evans (Interim Manager Community Education), B. Hopkins (Assistant Director), T. Maher (Assistant Director Planning and Strategy), E. Pryce (EAS), D. Hartevelde (EAS), J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Pritchard 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

RESOLVED that: -

- The Minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee held on 4th June 2014 (minute nos. 1-15, on page nos. 1-7) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to an amendment on Page 2, Minute nos. 6, paragraph 1, in the Report by the Cabinet Member, to advise that it should read five (not six) of the schools selected are within the County Borough.

- The Minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee held on 19th June 2014 (minute nos. 1-5, on page nos. 1-9) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to Councillor C. Durham being recorded as present at the meeting.

3. CALL - IN PROCEDURE

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

4. 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 Youth Service's new Health Education Resource, The Health and Wellbeing Toolkit. The release of the toolkit coincided with National Youth Work Week. The toolkit was originally developed in Caerphilly; however, it has been adapted and implemented across Wales as the definitive Health Resource for all Youth Services. Caerphilly, together with Regional Youth Service partners, have co-ordinated the development of a National development group to oversee further enhancements.

The resource compliments health messages being delivered in schools and other settings and its existence underlines the key role that Youth Workers play in communicating these messages to young people who would either not receive the advice from another source.

The press release was co-ordinated with Public Health, partners in designing and producing the resource. The Directorate have since received numerous requests for copies of the toolkit from non-youth work agencies across Wales, both statutory and voluntary in nature.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to announce that, since opening its doors on 6th January 2014, the new Caerphilly Town Library and Customer Service Centre has proven a popular venue for residents with 111,941 visits, an increase of 138% on the equivalent time period in 2013 at the former Morgan Jones site.

Similarly, the book and non-book resources at the new facility have also proven popular with more than 81,000 items having been borrowed compared to 54,000 the year previous, a 50% uplift. Some 40% of the book and non-book loans have been to children and young people.

On a related theme, Members noted that Newbridge Library and Cash Office at the Memo has seen a 156% increase in its visitor numbers and an 80% increase in borrowing since its successful relocation at the end of June 2013.

5. 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.

6. EDUCATION CAPITAL 2014/15- UPDATE

B. Hopkins presented the report, which identified the allocation of Education Capital budgets for the 2014/15 financial year.

Members were made aware of the severe pressure that the Education and School capital programme was under for 2014-15 and the requirement to fund important statutory works in relation to asbestos and electrical testing at schools during the year. As a result, it had not been possible to fund as many other school capital projects as hoped.

During the 2013-14 financial year, the Education Capital Programme encountered some unforeseen and unbudgeted in-year cost pressures. Therefore, for 2014-15 it had been determined to retain a contingency in both the main element of the Education programme and also the revenue/ capital 50/50 budget. The contingent sums would initially be required to fund slippage works from 2013/14 and any unallocated monies would be reviewed in the Autumn term.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and a full discussion ensued.

A Member queried the tendering process for contracts under £10,000. Following discussion, it was advised that the Member seek further information from Procurement and Property Services or request a report be provided to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Members discussed the asbestos works detailed within the report. It was highlighted that a detailed report was presented to the previous Committee; Councillor D. Preece requested that Committee Services sent a copy of the Asbestos Report presented to the last Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer and noted the contents of the report.

7. SUMMARY OF ESTYN INSPECTION OUTCOMES UNDER THE NEW COMMON INSPECTION FRAMEWORK (CIF)- SEPTEMBER 2013 TO MAY 2014

The report informed Members of the judgements made by Estyn inspection teams of Caerphilly schools for the academic year 2013-2014 (where published) and provided a summary of Caerphilly Schools' inspection judgements since the introduction of the new Common inspection Framework in September 2010.

Members noted that the schools included in the report were inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2013-14. Each School was inspected under the arrangements for inspections that came into effect on 1st September 2010.

The report identified the schools and the dates on which the inspections took place and contained a brief analysis of the inspection finding for each school.

Members thanked the Officers for the report and analysed and discussed the data. A Member queried the progress made within a Caerphilly CBC School that had been placed under Special Measures. Officers highlighted that a second visit to the school had recently been undertaken, the results of which were not yet published. However, Members noted that the school in question was making progress towards fulfilling Estyn's recommendations and there were clear signs of improvements.

A Member queried whether the data and outcomes had an impact on the number of parents requesting transfers to alternative schools. Officers confirmed that requests had been received from concerned parents, however, surgeries are provided by EAS to discuss the Inspection Outcomes and offer reassurance to parents, where necessary, on school performance and improvement.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officers for the report and noted its contents.

8. RENEWAL OF MAINSTREAM SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TRANSPORT CONTRACTS

The report sought the views of Members on the proposed changes to the renewal of mainstream school and college transport contracts, prior to its presentation to Cabinet. Members noted that a new framework is under development in preparation for the renewal of the existing contracts.

The report proposed that, following a review of the specification for mainstream education contracts, the existing transport arrangements be replaced with new contracts to commence from 1st January 2015 with a revised specification. The main changes being the relaxation of some areas of the previous contract requirements, particularly with regards to emission standards and the age of vehicles to ensure that the new contracts are affordable and let within available budget provision. Members noted that, due to the number of future expected changes in demand for home to school transport, the proposals would ensure that contracts are packaged and let flexibly and as efficiently as possible.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and a full discussion ensued.

Members raised concerns about the proposed maximum age of the vehicles and safety. Officers assured Members that all vehicles used for school transport contracts were to be a maximum of 25 years old at the start of the contract, were to be MOT tested and maintained appropriately. In addition, were concerns were raised about vehicles the Council organised unannounced spot checks in partnership with VOSA and the Police). Members also noted that, it was likely that the contracts would be let to local operators, which would be helpful if replacement vehicles were need due to a breakdown.

Clarification was sought from Officers as to the reasons why comparisons are made against other Local Authority contracts and processes. Members noted that this was in order to benchmark and make sensible decisions based on best practice.

Members sought further information on the contracts for taxis and mini-buses for school contracts. Officers explained that the taxi and minibus vehicles and drivers would be compliant with national legislative operational standards and were used specifically for home to school transport for children with disabilities or special needs. Following discussion, Councillor C. Gordon requested information on the upper age limit of taxi's and mini-buses used on home to school transport contracts. Officers advised that this would be covered in a Special Meeting of Education for Life Scrutiny Committee in September.

Having fully considered the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously endorsed.

The following recommendations would therefore be referred to Cabinet for consideration: -

The specification for mainstream school transport contracts is set as follows:

- All vehicles are single-decked.
- All vehicles are fitted with seat belts.
- All vehicles used must be a maximum of 25 years old at the start of the contract.
- Contracts are limited to a maximum length of 3 years.
- The introduction of a new contract variation clause, rather than annual reviews.
- New contracts will commence in January 2015.

9. CAERPHILLY LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY, 2014-2017.

The report advised Members of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee of the future strategic priorities for the Authority's Library Service between 2014 and 2017, building on the foundations of the 2009-2014 Five Year Development Plan and considerable investment

made by the Authority in its network of Library Facilities and services during the last six-year period.

Members noted that the proposed new Library Strategy was considered in the context of a new Welsh Government Quality Standards Framework 2014-2017, and with particular regard to the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements in respect of 2015-16 and 2016-17.

The Library Service Strategy would focus on managing the anticipated organisational changes required as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan and upon delivering in two key areas of activity, namely: -

- 'Reading Together'- Establishing best practice in promoting reading to individuals, families, and communities of place and interest, and improving core literacy skills to aid wider learning objectives.
- 'Digital e-Services'- Supporting residents to become digitally skilled and enabled to seek work online, access benefits electronically and to become more confident using the Internet for all their information needs.

The Scrutiny Committee was happy to receive the report and pleased with the proposals.

Members discussed the key activities and queried whether developments in technology have caused any significant impact on book loans within the service. Officers highlighted that there have been significant investment in IT stock recently to replace many of the PC's within libraries and the service is currently developing a Library App, which would provide users with access to the library catalogue and other services available online.

Members noted there have been some improvements in visits and better use is being made of the professional team, with reading being targeted in a more focussed way and an increase in themed activities within libraries during half terms, however, there is always room for improvement.

Having fully considered the report it was agreed that the Caerphilly Library Service Strategy be endorsed and its acceptance be recommended to Cabinet. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

10. REDUCED FUNDING FOR ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING 2014-2015

It was agreed that, as this item contained a recommendation to Cabinet, it should be received at this part of the meeting and not as an item for information, as detailed on the agenda.

The report provided Members of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee with information on the reduction in funding for Adult Community Learning in the 2014/15 academic year and provided options for consideration for future delivery of the service.

Members noted that Adult Community Learning faces significant reductions to the budget in 2014/15 academic year. Members considered the financial and personnel implications as detailed within the report and expressed concerns that a number of posts may be affected, although they were advised that actions would be undertaken in line with the Council's Redeployment and Redundancy Policy.

Following detailed consideration, Members expressed their concerns that the grant funding had been reduced and reference was made to the impact on the low-income residents living in the county borough.

Members were informed that the reduction in grant funding as outlined in Table 1 although confirmed by the Welsh Government (WG), Coleg Gwent and Coleg Cymoedd, was dependant on Caerphilly achieving the targets for delivery detailed in the grant agreement.

Members noted the impact of the reduction in funding on Management, Administration and Venue costs required to run eligible courses.

There were a number of courses previously funded by the grant that now do not qualify for grant funding. Paragraphs 4.5/4.7 detail options for charging learners and increasing room hire charges to try to maintain provision.

The Scrutiny Committee supported the proposals as outlined in paragraphs 4.5 and 4.7 of the report, as set out below, and recommended their approval to Cabinet:-

- (i) In order to mitigate the impact of the reduction in tutor hours, it be considered that the Service offers courses on a cost recovery basis. It is estimated that the cost would be £4 per hour per learner with an additional £3 per hour per learner for accreditation, if required (Courses would continue if they are viable due to the number attending)
- (ii) With regard to the marginal increases in room hire, it be proposed that these fees be increased at a level which remains competitive.

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

Members were reminded that a consultation is currently taking place around the Forward Work Programmes; Members were invited to feed directly into this with any requests for reports.

1. Councillor Martyn James requested a report on School Building Contracts under £10,000 and the tendering process. Officers advised that this was an issue for Procurement Services and therefore recommended that a request be made for a report to be brought to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
2. Councillor Denver Preece requested progress on a report on how the progress of “vulnerable” children within the borough is tracked and the outcomes of interventions made. Officers confirmed that this report will be on the agenda for the Committee in September.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. They were not brought forward for review.

1. Financial Plan Education and Lifelong Learning 2014/15;
2. Education and Lifelong Learning Grants 2014-15;
3. Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme;
4. Summary of Members Attendance- Quarter 1- 1st January 2014 to 7th May 2014;
5. SACRE Minutes- 5th March 2014.

The meeting closed at 19:38pm.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 23rd September 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN