



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chair
Councillor J. Pritchard - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

Mrs A. Blackman, J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D. Havard, Mrs G. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece, R. Saralis, M.E. Sargent and G. Johnston.

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: R. Passmore.

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), B. Hopkins (Assistant Director for Education), E. Pryce (Challenge Adviser – EAS), S. Hawkins (Community Centres Service Manager), T. Cunnick (Community, Youth Service & Adult Manager) L. Travis, (Senior Community Education Manager) C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer), Z. Powles (Solicitor) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: Mr A. Farina-Childs (Parent Governor) and Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.P. James, J. Roberts, C. Harrhy (Corporate Director - Education & Community Services), Mr M. Western, and Mrs A. Goss (Parent Governor Representative).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

At the commencement of the meeting, and with reference to the report on the Community Centres Task and Finish Group, Councillors J Bevan, P.J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, W. David (Chair), H.R. Davies, C. Durham, D. Havard, G. Johnston, Mrs G.D. Oliver, Mrs M.E. Sargent declared that they had each received dispensation from the Standards Committee in respect of their position as Management Committee Members of Community Centres in their wards.

3. MINUTES – 7TH JULY 2015

RESOLVED that, subject to it being noted that M. Western had attended the meeting and had not been recorded as such, the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 7th July 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 11) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THIS 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.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Councillor R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, provided details of the move of YGG Caerffili (Welsh Medium Primary 3-11) from their previous buildings into the refurbished and modernised listed building that forms part of the former St Ilan site. The move took place at the commencement of the academic year and has resulted in a much improved teaching and learning environment for the pupils.

Flying Start has registered new CCBC childcare settings with CSSIW which will open this term in Gelligaer (Greenhill Primary), Senghenydd (Nant y Parc Primary) and Penllwyn Millennium Centre serving the Penllwyn and part of the Bryn Estates. New contracted non-maintained childcare settings will also be offering Flying Start from September, including increasing the number offering Welsh Medium Flying Start childcare places.

As part of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) review the Local Authority has been developing the role of Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre – further extending the ‘unlocking the potential’ philosophy through a ‘hub and spoke’ approach. The model used it to develop a flexible response to pupil need and individual school context. A Trinity Field’s satellite class has been successfully established in Cwm Ifor Primary School. In this model, pupils in the satellite class are from Trinity Fields and the staff are recruited and employed by Trinity Fields. A partnership agreement signed by the school (Head teacher and Chair of Governors) of Trinity Fields and the Local Authority, sets out agreed roles and responsibilities. From September 2015 a member of staff from Trinity Field’s School has been recruited to work in a primary Specialist Resource Base (SRB) class – in this model the SRB children remain on the roll of the Primary School. The teacher is employed by Trinity Fields. As with the satellite class there is a signed partnership agreement which sets out agreed roles and responsibilities of each setting. In January 2016, a second primary SRB class will have a Trinity Fields member of staff in place. This model ensures that teachers in specialist settings have strong background in managing children with complex needs and the appropriate professional support and training.

The Education Achievement Service will be inspected by ESTYN between 16th – 27th May 2016.

Members were informed that performance at KS4 remains provisional until January 2016. A full report will be presented to scrutiny in February alongside an update in relation to the revised new school categorisations.

In addition, the Cabinet Member was pleased to announce that although the data is provisional there has been an improvement in all indicators. Nonetheless, the rate of improvement remains too slow to effect Caerphilly County Borough Council’s comparative position in a positive way, but we do compare well at this stage with our EAS region. The authority is meeting with the EAS to agree actions to ensure that the progress is accelerated.

In closing, the Cabinet member confirmed that as was requested at the previous Scrutiny Meeting, School visits for Members are being facilitated at St Gwladys, St Cenydd and Cwm Ifor Schools. Details of the arrangements will be sent to Members in due course.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for the update.

6. 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.

7. REDUCTION IN FUNDING FOR ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING

L. Travis, Senior Community Education Manager, informed members of the outcome of the reduction of funding for the academic year 2015/16.

Members were informed that over the last 2 financial years there had been a significant reduction in funding for Adult Community Learning and were referred to Appendix 1 of the report which tabled the reduction levels. It was noted that over £558,000 of funding had been lost and as a result the service had changed its delivery model in order to meet these budgetary requirements reducing the amount of provision it could support. In turn learner numbers had decreased and it was anticipated that this figure would continue to decline due to further funding reductions in 2015/16.

The different areas where savings would be implemented were summarised and included the non-renewal of the lease at Bedwas Workman's Hall which is due to expire on the 15th October 2015. Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen Community Council had agreed to take on the clubs and societies currently utilising the Hall and scheduled courses had been moved to other local venues. Members were advised that voluntary severance had been offered to all staff with applications considered on an individual business case basis and the vacant posts deleted from the staffing structure.

Assurances were given that Welsh Government priority learning areas around Essential Skills, Employability, Independent Living Skills and Welsh for Adults would continue to be provided at Oxford House Risca, Blackwood Comprehensive School, Risca Basic Skills Unit, The Hangar, Aberbargoed and Crumlin Institute.

The Officer confirmed that funding for the school based Families First Learning would end in October 2015, however it would continue to be provided in four local schools but as a much reduced programme.

All management information systems functions would move to a partnership arrangement with other authorities and data governance arrangements would be set up in order to facilitate data sharing. A senior management post would also be deleted from the staffing structure to make the 20% saving on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) by March 2017.

Members were advised that Officers were awaiting further information from Welsh Government on direct grant funding levels. This is expected sometime in January 2016 and would include 'Post 16' provision for the next academic year.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and Members questions were welcomed.

Clarification was sought with regard to an expected decision on ESF funding and the Officer confirmed that the preliminary project start was 1st September running until April 2018, talks were currently underway with Communities First and staff would look to start service delivery soon. It was noted that a 'triage' team would be initiated and they would ensure that service users were directed to the right project for their individual needs.

Members referenced the loss of the School Based Family Learning initiative and the Officer confirmed that every effort had been made in this regard and enough funding had been secured to allow some school based family learning to continue by restructuring within the basic skills unit.

Clarification was sought with regard to the Bedwas Workingman's Hall lease and the role of Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen Community Council in supporting the clubs and groups accessing the Hall were discussed at length. A Member expressed concern with regard to the long term sustainability of the current arrangement.

A Member referred to the geographical spread of the learning centres and that this would leave a large portion of the County Borough uncovered. The Officer confirmed that the programme has been tailored to areas of identified need, with a range of courses offered in a range of areas. However, when delivering in the community it should be noted that Communities First areas would often provide free venues.

Members agreed the need to occupy Council owned buildings and free venues first with lease arrangements considered only as a last resort, the continued delivery of learning services being the priority.

Having fully considered its content the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

8. ISLWYN WEST SECONDARY SCHOOL (IWSS) – UPDATE

T. Williams, Head Teacher Islwyn High School and B. Hopkins, Assistant Director 21st Century Schools provided an update on the progress of the project.

The Assistant Director provided an overview of the progress to date and confirmed that the project would be managed by AECOM with Wilmott Dixon as contractor. The contractor has established a site compound and soil excavations are progressing. Welsh Government approved a permanent build extension on the 11th June 2015 with the funding bid of £1.5m approved in a 50/50 split between CCBC and WG.

Members were referred to section 5.4. of the Officer's report which detailed the SEWSCAP conditions of the contract which makes provision for the financial 'pain and gain' to be apportioned between the Contractor and the Authority. The 'share of difference' implications were explained and the actual costs as a percentage of target cost rationale confirmed.

The anticipated completion date, as advised by the contractor was noted as the 23rd April 2017 but with two winters and associated weather conditions within this timeframe this could be subject to change.

Having noted the indicative completion date, Members queried the level of confidence in its achievement. The Officer acknowledged the Members' concerns given the complex nature of the 2 stage project, however, should nothing materially alter as the project progressed then the 23rd April 2017 would see its completion.

Clarification was sought in relation to 'penalty clauses' and the Officer confirmed there would be an opportunity to update the Committee, however, reparation levels would be dependent on the reason for the delay. In terms of contract payments, Members queried how this would

be managed going forward and were advised that payments would be made on a monthly basis, as this would afford better cash flow for providers and secure greater budgetary control. Quality assurance guarantees were queried and it was noted that target costs were assessed to ensure that works will be commensurate with the quality expected from the Contractors, who are very experienced in constructing Educational establishments.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and responding to questions.

T. Williams presented his aspirations for the school and the opportunities, challenges and responsibilities to be embraced going forward. Members were also informed of the cost and effectiveness with 21st Century facilities, the curriculum opportunities for pupils and ensuring that the school plays a central part in the community.

A member raised an issue in respect of 'parental choice' as the school may receive appeals in response to admission refusal and was advised that any appeals would be dealt with in accordance with the admission appeals procedure.

In closing, T. Williams advised that members of staff will be accountable for Performance Management and that the school will use data strategically, to monitor targets on an annual basis.

T. Williams was thanked for his informative presentation and for responding to the questions raised by the Members.

Having fully considered the presentation and content of the Officer's Report, the Committee noted the update.

9. PUPIL ATTAINMENT AT FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGE 2 AND KEY STAGE 3 2015

E. Pryce, Challenge Adviser (EAS) informed Members of pupils' attainment in teacher assessment at Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

Members were informed that all schools are subject to rigorous reporting and monitoring of standards each year, with the principal focus in key stages 2 and 3 being on English/Welsh first language, mathematics and science, and the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in all three core subjects (core subject indicator – CSI).

Reference was made to para 4.1.15, regarding Foundation Phase Indicators (FPI), when compared with other Local Authorities in Wales. Performance in Caerphilly (ranked 6th) is significantly higher than could be expected and above the national figures for all areas of learning, which is positive. In relation to para 4.2.16, many of the Core Subject Indicators rankings have remained the same. The Officer raised the importance of para 4.3.2. and the 10 Year Performance Summary at Key Stage 3 (CSI).

A discussion took place regarding gender differences throughout the various stages at both local and national levels.

A Member queried the verification process at KS2 and KS3. The Officer informed Members that the Local Authority can now be confident in the 'spot check' sampling process in relation to numeracy and literacy, as there are tighter processes in place.

In closing, the Officer informed Members that the focus in Primary Schools is on the children consolidating numeracy and literacy and comparisons in relation to these statistics will be provided at a future Scrutiny Meeting.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the report and noted the contents.

10. COMMUNITY CENTRES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

It was noted that Councillors J Bevan, P.J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, W. David (Chair), H.R. Davies, C. Durham, D. Havard, G. Johnston, Mrs G.D. Oliver, Mrs M.E. Sargent had each received dispensation from the Standards Committee in respect of their position as Management Committee Members of Community Centres in their wards.

Councillor J. Pritchard reminded Members that the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group to review the Council's support of community centre provision throughout the County Borough. The purpose of the Group was to investigate the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings options for the community centres budget and to make any recommendations necessary based on an anticipated reduction target of £64k for the 2016/17 financial year.

S. Hawkins (Community Centres Service Manager) and B. Hopkins (Assistant Director – Education) outlined the main findings of the Task and Finish Group that held a series of four meetings during June and July 2015. The Officer confirmed that much consideration was given to the future of this service, in respect of cost savings on water rates, reducing caretaking costs and the closure of some community centres, which may then be taken over by local groups under asset transfer. The issues examined by the Group were community centres location and proximity, asset transfer, operation and performance and revenue costs.

Clarification was sought in relation to the criteria used such as usage, condition and suitability and the Officer confirmed there were a range of factors involved and that Cabinet would need to agree any proposals/recommendations prior to engaging in discussions with local groups, for consideration of future use.

A Member queried delegating responsibilities to the Management Committees and the Officer confirmed that it would be difficult to ensure that arrangements are put in place for issues such as insurance and on that basis the risks would be considered too great.

Members discussed the matter of asset transfer and it was confirmed that there are no local examples for comparison. Asset transfer is an extremely complex issue that is not a new concept, it was introduced by the Government approximately 15 years ago with the 'Community in Mind'.

The Officer referred Members to the recommendations set out in para 9 of the report. A Member raised a query in relation to para 9.4. and felt that Rhymney Day Centre, which had been used daily by Social Services until recently, hadn't been given an opportunity to contact other groups that may wish to use the venue.

The Committee thanked the Officers for their report.

It was moved and seconded that with the exception of Rhymney Day Centre (para 9.4. refers) the recommendations contained in the report be recommended to Cabinet for approval. This will allow Rhymney Day Centre more time to explore developing its usage. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that with the exception of Rhymney Day Centre the recommendations as set out below be referred to Cabinet for approval:

- (i) that the council cuts the budget for payment of water rates for community centres to achieve savings of £27k.
- (ii) that the council reduces its caretaking contribution from 12 hours per week to 11 hours per week for each community centre, and recharges each community centre for one hour per week (to achieve savings of £14k).

- (iii) that two centres are put forward for closure Tirphil and Channel View (Risca), to achieve savings of £18k (Rhymney Day Centre being allowed more time to develop its usage).
- (iv) that miscellaneous items be cut from the budget to achieve savings of £5k.

11. SCHOOL UNIFORM ARRANGEMENTS – CCBC SECONDARY SCHOOL

B. Hopkins (Assistant Director – Education) provided Members with an overview of the report, which highlighted that the School Uniform Policy is a delegated function to schools and whilst schools are completely autonomous they must have regard to current Welsh Government Guidance.

The Officer referred to para 4.7. and outlined the difficulties in comparing the differentials to establish average prices, based upon required items of clothing only (incorporating very difficult to badge/logo) varying from £20 to £125.

The Chair noted that standing orders require that committee meetings sit for no longer than 3 hours unless committee members agree to suspend standing orders. Therefore in order to ensure that the meeting should end before or at 8:30pm the Chair deferred discussion on this item and asked that it be brought forward to the next available agenda.

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

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

13. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following item, Single Integrated Plan – Learning Caerphilly Update, full details of which were included within the Officers Report. This was not brought forward for review.

The meeting closed at 8.30 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 3rd November 2015, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR