



## EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH  
ON TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.**

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### 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, M.P. James, G. Johnston, Mrs G. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece and R. Saralis.

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: R. Passmore.

### Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), B. Hopkins (Assistant Director for Education), G. Evans (Senior Manager - Planning & Strategy - Library Services) J. Elias (Service Manager – Additional Learning Needs), J. Rawlins (Principal Challenge Adviser Caerphilly), Z. Powles (Solicitor) and C. Evans (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 J. Roberts and Mrs M. Sargent.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

### 3. MINUTES – 22ND SEPTEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 22nd September 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 13) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

##### Minute Number 10 - Communities Centres Task and Finish Group

In response to a query raised in relation to consultation with relevant management committees, it was noted that consultation would be conducted before the report is presented to Cabinet.

#### **5. 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.

#### **6. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

Councillor R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning provided details of the visits arranged for Members to attend Cwm Ifor Primary School, St. Gwladys School and St. Cenydd School. Feedback from Members was positive stating they found the visits useful and helpful. As such, more will be planned for the future.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that, of the 131 schools across Wales selected to be part of the Lead Creative Schools Scheme 2015-17, 15 Caerphilly County Borough Council Schools were amongst those selected. Funding will be provided by Arts Council Wales to work with artists to create innovative and bespoke programmes of learning designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The considerable time, effort and communication associated with the process was acknowledged and Members noted that an exciting 3 years lies ahead.

The Committee noted that works have commenced on the Islwyn High School site, and progressing well and on schedule. In addition, on 30th September 2015 the pupil ambassadors for the new school completed a leg of an 800 mile charity baton relay organised by the contractor Willmott Dixon. The pupils carried a baton from the former Oakdale Colliery site to Abergavenny.

Caerphilly is a partner in the Bridges into Work 2 Project (West Wales and Valleys operation, which aims to address economic inactivity across 5 Local Authority areas in South East Wales (West Wales and the Valleys). Through a collaborative approach, the operation aims to engage, support and prepare the economically inactive (including those who are long-term unemployed), in the most deprived areas outside of the Communities First cluster areas, to acquire the appropriate skills to become job ready and to gain sustainable employment.

In addition, Caerphilly is a partner in Working Skills for Adults 2 (West Wales and Valleys), which aims to increase the ownership of generic, transferable skills at all levels from basic to level 2 across the workforce through community based provision, thereby improving the opportunities for currently low skilled workers to sustain employment and increase earning potential. Community based provision will focus on supporting reluctant learners to engage with flexible learning opportunities outside of the workplace and will offer a range of provision including literacy, numeracy, ICT and other generic transferable skills. Basic literacy and numeracy skills acquisition will form a key area to improve the mobility of the workforce and sustainable employment.

The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and discussion ensued. A Member sought clarification on the age range for the Bridges into Work project and the funding stream for the projects. Officers highlighted that the scheme was available for ages 18 – 24 year olds, and both schemes are funded by European Funding. Following discussion,

Officers agreed to provide a report to the Committee on the various schemes provided and the collaborative/ joint Local Authority approach, to make the schemes more effective.

## **7. 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.

## **8. SCHOOL UNIFORM ARRANGEMENTS – CCBC SECONDARY SCHOOL**

The report provided Members with information on school uniform arrangements in CCBC secondary schools.

School Uniform Policy falls within the remit of the school to determine. Whilst schools are completely autonomous they must have regard to current Welsh Government guidance specifically, guidance for governing bodies on uniform and appearance policies, (Circular 015/2011) when formulating uniform policy.

Welsh Government, via the Council provides a uniform grant at the start of secondary school which totals £105, for parents who are in receipt of Child Tax Credit only, (Excluding working tax credit and where the annual income is less than £16,190) Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance or support under Part VI of the immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Discussions ensued around the varying prices of uniforms and specifications within schools. Whilst Members noted that there are provisions within many supermarkets for school uniforms, this is not the case for a number of schools within the borough. Officers highlighted that Governors within schools can have an influence on practices within schools and uniforms, as can parents and pupils, and Members were reminded that, as local members or Governors, they can signpost concerned parents to the school to raise their concerns. In addition, it was noted that there are a number of schemes available within some schools across the Borough, such as uniform recycling. It was agreed that the Chief Education Officer would write to schools across the borough to highlight the concerns raised by the Scrutiny Committee, encourage consultation with parents and suggest alternatives such as uniform banks.

Having fully considered the report, it was agreed that its content be noted and for the reasons outlined at the meeting, a letter be sent to schools to highlight the concerns raised by the Committee, encourage consultation with parents and suggest alternatives such as uniform banks. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

## **9. FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

In response to a request from a Member of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee, the report provided details of measures that are in place, to promote applications for free school meals within the county borough.

A child may be entitled to receive free school meals if their parent/carer is entitled to receive certain benefits. Accessing free school meals (FSM) also allows parents to receive a one-off clothing grant of £105 when a child is moving from primary school to secondary school. FSM numbers are collected by Welsh Government every January as part of the Pupil Level Annual

Survey Census (PLASC) data collection process. The mechanism by which Welsh Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to each Council consists of more than 50 data sets, including FSM numbers, which determine each Council's funding allocation. Schools also receive a Pupil Deprivation Grant for each FSM pupil of £1050, rising to £1150 in 2016/17. Welsh Government use FSM numbers as a key indicator for deprivation throughout Wales and they are also a consideration in reporting on school performance.

A number of measures are in place to promote applications for FSM, which was enhanced following a review in 2014 in response to a fall in FSM numbers within the county as well as the rest of Wales. 511 additional claims were recorded in the January 2015 PLASC return; approximately 300 of which were in the 5 to 15 years age range, which are funded.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. A Member sought further information on the entitlement process and the implications for those parents/ carers who are working 0 hour contracts. The Officer highlighted that the benefits entitlement is calculated on P60 earnings; however, 0 hour contracts are posing an issue in the process. In order to ensure that entitlements are as accurate as possible, periodic eligibility checks are conducted. However, it was noted that, if a child would no longer be eligible, no steps are taken to recover costs. Members were reminded that, if there are any queries from their constituents regarding their eligibility, they can be signposted to officers for clarification.

Members discussed the stigma associated with Free School Meals and the possible impact this could have on the take up. Officers highlighted that extensive work has been conducted with a number of departments, such as Housing Benefits, in an attempt to increase take-up amongst eligible families.

Discussions ensued around the age of eligibility for Free School Meals and it was noted that claims are received for children under 5 years of age, however, the cost cannot be claimed back for take up if the child is under 5 (compulsory school age) or over 15. It was agreed that Officers would gather further information on Welsh Government Guidance for Free School Meals and distribute to Members.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and the Chair invited Mr Chris Parry, Head Teacher, Lewis School Pengam to the meeting to provide a presentation on Free School Meals.

The Presentation highlighted that over 200,000 children live in poverty in the UK, 15% of which are living in severe poverty. IN addition, statistics show that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to not be in education, employment or training and live shorter lives from those from more affluent backgrounds.

Lewis School Pengam is a Secondary School for boys, situated in Gilfach, Bargoed. The School serves some of the less affluent areas within the borough and as a result, 24.6% of the pupil population are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM). Of this percentage, a significant proportion is in receipt of alternative provision.

Mr Parry highlighted that, whilst deprivation is a key issue for the school, significant steps are being taken by the staff and pupils in order to combat this. The school are considering a number of innovative options in order to encourage parent's attendance and involvement within the school, and often to reduce any stigma they may have. The school offers a number of opportunities for pupils to take part in mentoring schemes, and extensive work has been conducted between the staff, pupils and alumni to offer a mentoring programme to assist pupils to enter the job market.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Headteacher for the excellent presentation and discussion ensued.

A Member sought further information on the Mentoring Programme and it was noted that, the school have benefitted from a number of alumni willing to share their experience and

knowledge with interested pupils, and alumni from all jobs/careers are welcome to share their experience with pupils. There is a keen focus on alumni providing information from industry or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) within the school, which aims to provide pupils with the relevant skills and knowledge to meet the developing technology and expanding job market.

A Member queried how the school aims to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met. Mr Parry highlighted that there is a clear understanding within the school that FSM should have no impact on a pupils ability, and as such, pupils are tracked throughout their schooling and suitable, bespoke packages of support are offered, where necessary. In addition, the school works hard to engage families, build a good home/school relationship and encourage learning at home.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Head teacher for the presentation and noted the content of the report.

## **10. ALN REVIEW - UPDATE**

The report provided Members with an update on the progress of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Review and the proposals to seek approval from Cabinet to go out to formal consultation to close the Special Resource Base (SRB) at Hendre Junior School and realign the Social Inclusion Base at Cefn Fforest Primary School.

The ALN Review aims to identify strengths and areas for development within the current services, and provide options for the delivery of services for children and young people with additional learning needs. Hendre Junior School is located on St Cenydd Road, Trecenydd, Caerphilly; it is an English medium school. The Specialist Resource Base (SRB) is designated to support a total of 8 Key Stage 2 aged pupils with severe hearing impairment. During the 2013-14 academic year, attendance at the SRB reduced from 3 pupils to 1. In April 2015, the remaining pupil was transferred to Trinity Fields School. It is therefore proposed that the SRB at Hendre Junior School is closed, due to the considerable advancements made within new-born hearing screening and medical intervention, alongside the surplus places for a number of years.

Cefn Fforest Primary School serves the village of Cefn Fforest, is an English medium school and currently hosts two specialist classes, one social inclusion class takes pupils in year 3 and 4 from other schools and the pupils are dual registered and the other class caters for Key Stage 2 pupils with complex needs from all over the local authority.

It is proposed that the Social Inclusion Class at Cefn Fforest is re-designated to be a Key Stage 1 Complex Needs Specialist Resource Base. The setting currently has a Key Stage 2 Complex Needs SRB. The ALN Review has recognised that children in SRB settings benefit from cross-phase continuity so that transition for children between key phases can be managed more effectively. A recommendation from the review has been to review current complex needs provision and where possible ensure that both key stages of the provision are in the same setting.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. Members raised concerns that, with the closure of Hendre and re-designation of Cefn Fforest, whether there would be sufficient provision available throughout the borough. Members were assured that, compared to other local authorities, the provision within Caerphilly is significantly higher. There is no telling what future demand may be, however there is sufficient provision available to address current need.

Members noted that, during the Review, a number of models and best practices have been identified, one of which was through Trinity Fields, in which a full time teacher has been posted within the school to provide training on the ground for mainstream teachers, to upskill

them in the necessary environment.

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

## **11. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL'S ANNUAL LIBRARY STANDARDS ASSESSMENT 2014-2015**

The report, which detailed the progress made by the County Borough Library Service in seeking to meet the 5th Framework of Welsh Government Public Library Standards, Core Entitlements, and Qualitative Indicators, during 2014-15, and provided a guide to the new features contained in the 2014-2017 Welsh Government Public Library Standards Framework, was considered by the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee on the 3rd November 2015.

Members noted that this is the 1st year of the new Framework that will operate until 31st March 2017 and includes a number of new assessment areas with a focus on outcome and qualitative measures in addition to more traditional standards of attainment.

Caerphilly County Borough was assessed as meeting 17 of the 18 Welsh Government Core Entitlements for Public Library Service provision, with one Entitlement met in part. The Borough Library Service was deemed as meeting 6 of the 7 Quality Indicators for Wales with none failed in totality and was described by the Assessors and Reference Panel as being a "strong performer" within Wales achieving a number of indicators that other Council's have failed to achieve.

It was noted that, the Assessment Group stated that "Caerphilly Library Service is a strong performer and is to be congratulated on its high visits and active borrower figures per capita. It is also meeting several targets which most other authorities are failing".

However, the Welsh Government Public Libraries Standards Reference Group noted a number of areas of performance that were below the average for Wales and required further attention by the Borough Council in order to continue to deliver a strong performing service in the future. These included informal training for customers, increasing the use of Public Computer Services and providing Wi-Fi to customers in the additional one third of static Library bases that do not currently offer the service.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the positive report and that overall the assessment of the County Borough Council's Public Library Service for 2014-2015 was positive and complementary of the investment and strategic leadership the Authority has provided over a number of years.

Following consideration and discussion of the report, the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee unanimously recommended to Cabinet that for the reasons contained therein:

- (i) the information received from the County Borough Library Service with regard to its performance for 2014-2015 in working towards achieving the 5th Framework of Welsh Government Public Library Standards, 2014-2017 be noted;
- (ii) the Welsh Government's Public Library Standard Reference Group assessment of this performance (as detailed in the appendices to the report), and the Authority's attainment of 17 Core Entitlements and 6 Quality Indicators that have target levels of attainment be noted;
- (iii) in noting that the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee have endorsed its content, the Welsh Government Public Library Standards Annual Report 2014-2015 be approved.

## **12. STATUTORY NATIONAL TESTING FOR PUPILS IN Y2 – Y9**

The report, which was provided by J. Rawlins - EAS, provided Members with information on the statutory testing process in mathematics and English and the outcomes of pupils in Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) schools and outlines the scope of the testing process within primary and secondary schools, the pupil outcomes and comparisons to the teacher assessment process at Y2, Y6 and Y9.

It was noted that the annual tests, which were introduced in May 2013, are part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), and aim to give schools an accurate gauge of individual pupil skills and abilities, help drive up literacy and numeracy standards in children throughout Wales and provide a clear picture of how children are performing nationally.

EAS undertake a statutory responsibility, on behalf of the Local Authority, to monitor the assessment arrangements in at least 10 percent of schools, to ensure that assessment arrangements are in accordance with the test administration timetable and test administration guidance.

Members noted that standardised tests in English reading and maths measure the child's achievement compared to other children in all schools across Wales at the same age level. Scores below Standard Score (SS) (85) are considered below average and 85 – 115 are considered to be within the average range. SS of 115+ is considered to be above average. In Caerphilly, performance was relatively stronger at Standard Score (SS)115+ than at SS85+ and Local Authority rankings were similar to FSM rankings.

Primary benchmark performance in Caerphilly was average overall, with roughly 25% of schools in each quarter in year 2 and year 6. Performance in year 9 was above average, with less than 25% schools in the bottom quarter and half Caerphilly's secondary schools in the top quarter.

In addition, the Committee noted that Caerphilly had the lowest proportion of pupils absent or disappplied from the national tests in 2015 with figures well below national averages and below those of Monmouth for all but the reasoning test.

Members thanked the Officer for the detailed report and discussion ensued.

In noting the performance data, a Member queried what support would be made available to Key Stage 3 pupils, if their results were below the SS85 score. The Officer highlighted that, as a result of pupil tracking, secondary schools are provided with details of a pupils abilities and support requirements, and are therefore aware of the attainment level of each pupil. Additional support can be provided to pupils to ensure that they are achieving the recommended standards, however, support is tailored to the child, as a “one size fits all” approach is not always suitable.

A Member queried the support provided by the EAS teams during the Statutory National Tests. The Officer highlighted that schools are supported to ensure pupils are receiving the correct support and education, in order to meet the standards before moving onto secondary school. The aim of the tests is to determine the ability of the individual pupil and provide any necessary support where needed.

Having fully considered the report, the Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer and noted the contents.

## **13. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE PLACED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA**

Councillor J. Bevan requested a report on the outcomes of the 4 projects linked to Workings Skills. Officers confirmed that a report would be provided in January 2016.

#### **14. INFORMATION ITEMS**

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

- Behaviour Strategy – Update
- Service Improvement Plan and Improvement Objectives 2015-2016 – 6 Month Review.

The meeting closed at 8.25 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 12th January 2016, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR