



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON MONDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY 2017 AT 5.30PM.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, C. Gordon, M.P. James, G. Johnston, Mrs. P. Marsden, D.W.R. Preece, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis.

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Principal Finance Officer), A. West (School Admissions and Exclusions Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), T. Rawson (Solicitor), A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Councillor D. Havard (Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning).

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governor), Mrs J. Havard and Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT), M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative).

A. Williams (Principal Challenge Advisor – EAS)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.R. Davies, Mrs G.D. Oliver, D. Rees, Mrs M.E. Sargent and J. Simmonds, Mr M. Barry (Parent Governor).

2. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Mr Tate, Head Teacher of Ysgol Bae Baglan School to the Scrutiny Committee Meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J. Bevan and Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT) declared an interest in relation to agenda item 12, and Councillor C. Gordon and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association) declared an interest in relation to agenda item 9 at the commencement of the meeting. Details of which are recorded with the respective items.

4. MINUTES – 15TH DECEMBER 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 15th December 2016 (minute nos. 1-3) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. MINUTES – 10TH JANUARY 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 10th January 2017 (minute nos. 1-14) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY 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.

7. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER

Councillor D. Havard (Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning) advised the Scrutiny Committee of a three day visit from ten professionals from Latvia to learn about the provision of autism services in Wales. They were extremely impressed when they recently visited Panside Primary School and Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre (examples of excellent practice with regard to their management of provision for children and young people with autism).

The Cabinet Member was pleased to report the launch of the Cynnydd/Progress Programme offering work experience to young people in care and leaving care across Council Services that was introduced on the 2nd February 2017. Sally Holland (Children's Commissioner for Wales) attended in support of the launch to welcome the first 5 trainees who will gain valuable work experience whilst working towards a Level 1 qualification. The remaining places will be offered to those young people who are currently not in education, employment or training programmes. He confirmed that funding is provided by the European Social Fund and Welsh Government and the trainees will be eligible to claim a weekly allowance of between £35 and £50 plus travel expenses. Traineeship placements can last for up to a year when ongoing support will be provided from the education provider and a Youth Mentor from the Communities First Employment Team.

The Parent Network continues to support the development of PETRA Publishing (Parents engaging to raise aspirations) which is a book writing literacy project aimed at parents and children. To date the project has produced more than 10 story books, including a new one produced with Communities First and Tir y Berth Primary School (children, staff and parents) called 'The Unhappy Lion', which focussed on gender realignment. It involved training from Umbrella Cymru and was written in order to support the school, pupils and parents to understand a very sensitive subject.

In concluding, Councillor Havard updated Members regarding the development of the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF), which is a requirement under the Families First Programme. He gave an overview of the developments that aims to replace the plethora of referral forms that professionals need to use to access provision for adults, families and young people.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his report.

8. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE 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.

9. EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Head of Democratic Services presented the report which outlined the draft Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme from March 2017 to July 2017. Members were asked to consider the work programme and make any amendments or propose any additional items to be included for future meetings.

The Committee were informed that the meeting scheduled for the 4th April 2017 has been cancelled and a Special Education for Life Scrutiny Committee has been arranged for the 14th March 2017. The EAS Business Plan has been moved from April to the meeting scheduled on the 7th June 2017.

Members requested reports on the Erasmus Plus Project with details on the exchange programmes available and in relation to the Donaldson Project with details on successful futures. The Interim Head of Democratic Services confirmed that she would contact Members after the meeting for further information so that an appropriate date can be found to add the reports to the Forward Work Programme.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Resolved that subject to the foregoing, the work programme appended to the report be approved:

- (i) the meeting scheduled for the 4th April 2017 be cancelled;
- (ii) a Special Education for Life Scrutiny Committee be arranged for the 14th March 2017;
- (iii) the EAS Business Plan be moved from the cancelled meeting in April to the meeting scheduled on the 7th June 2017.

10. CABINET REPORTS

The Cabinet report listed on the agenda had not been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

11. CONSULTATION – PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A RHYMNEY 3 – 18 SCHOOL

The Chair gave permission for this item to be brought forward on the agenda.

Mrs P. Ireland (NUT) declared a prejudicial interest in this item as she is employed at Rhymney Comprehensive School and as such left the room whilst the item was presented and did not take part in the debate. Councillor J. Bevan declared an interest in this item as he is a School Governor at Rhymney Comprehensive School and Abertysswg Primary School. As the interest was personal he was not required to leave the room.

Mr Tate, Head Teacher of Ysgol Bae Baglan School in Port Talbot delivered a presentation in relation to his school's 3-16 journey. He set out the background and timescales to the Federation in Neath and Port Talbot that included 4 schools. An overview was provided in relation to the context of the school and the challenges faced. He confirmed that there were concerns in relation to the amalgamation in particular the large age range of pupils and the different approaches from each school. The Head Teacher highlighted the benefits of an All Through School including specialist facilities with broader academic and pastoral opportunities, cross phase learning, budget savings and an opportunity to develop 21st Century learning. There were no compulsory redundancies throughout the whole process.

The Chair thanked the Head Teacher for his informative presentation and Members questions were welcomed.

Members sought information as to the greatest difficulty with the introduction of the new 3-16 school and were informed that fundamentally it was changing the mind-set of all involved. This required a lot of consultation with parents and pupils when consideration was being given to the school. Clarification was sought in terms of improved performance indicators and the Head Teacher confirmed that attendance levels have improved and the level of exclusions has reduced and it is believed this is due to engagement from all parties. With his experience, Mr Tate would recommend a 3-18 school and the reason his school is 3-16 is because none of the schools in the Neath and Port Talbot area offer a sixth form facility. Following year 11, pupils then attend college.

The Principal Finance Officer then introduced the report that sets out the proposals as part of the consultation process. This provided Members with an opportunity to comment on the proposals, prior to the move to Statutory Notice being considered by Cabinet.

Members were reminded that Cabinet, at its meeting on 30th November 2016, agreed to proceed to a formal consultation process that was undertaken between the 3rd January 2017 and 16th February 2017. The main issues from the consultative meetings were summarised and were circulated to the Scrutiny Committee prior to the meeting.

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that 13 written responses had been received (3 in favour of the proposal, with 7 against and 3 who did not feel strongly either way). The responses are largely consistent with those outlined during the consultation meetings. The main issues raised both written and orally were summarised. Many of which do not directly relate to the 3-18 school, examples of which, including distance criteria were appended to the report. Members were referred to Appendix 2 of the report that sets out the views of Estyn in relation to the proposal. The proposed timetable for the school was also set out.

Clarification was sought in relation to the current Head Teacher's in place for the individual schools and it was explained they are currently appointed in an 'Acting' capacity and no compulsory redundancies across the schools are anticipated. It is intended that one Head of School and 3 Phase Leaders will be appointed from within the 3 schools. The driver for this is that each Teacher will already know the children within their own schools and the Phase Leaders will get to know the children in their allocated areas. It was also confirmed that the budget will remain the same for the new school. In terms of merging the schools, it has been agreed that a 'Working Group' will be set up to include representatives from Rhymney, Pontlottyn and Abertyswg School for the preparation and during the transition period.

A Member queried if a Resource Base in the Rhymney 3-18 School had been considered and was informed there is currently sufficient capacity within the north of the Borough based in Deri.

Having fully considered the report, the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the proposals contained therein and recommended they be submitted to Cabinet.

12. CONSULTATION – PROPOSED ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2018/2019

The School Admissions and Exclusions Manager introduced the report that sets out the proposed changes to the Schools Admission Arrangements for the academic year 2018/2019. This provided Members with an opportunity to comment on proposals as part of the consultation process before recommendations are considered by Cabinet. Members were advised that there are no proposed changes to the Admission Arrangements, appended to the report.

The Scrutiny Committee was informed that the consultation process will conclude on 1st March 2017 and in accordance with the School Admissions Code (2013), the admission arrangements must be determined by 15th April 2017. Head teachers, all Chairs of Governors, all neighbouring Local Authorities, Caerphilly County Borough Council's Admission Forum and the Scrutiny Committee have been consulted as part of the process.

Members sought clarification in relation to the catchment areas for Risca and Newbridge Schools. It was explained that there are no proposals to change the catchment area and that currently both schools have sufficient capacity for admission numbers. Concerns were expressed in relation to increased numbers of out of county admission applications. The Committee were reassured that on the 28th February 2017, 4,500 letters will be sent out to parents who have applied for admission and every child whose parent had applied by the closing date for their catchment school have been offered placement for September 2017.

Having considered the content of the Officer's report, the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the proposals contained therein be submitted to Cabinet.

13. KEY STAGE 4 / KEY STAGE 5 PERFORMANCE 2016

The Chief Education Officer presented Members with the final published 2016 performance data for key stage 4 and 5 for Caerphilly schools'. The Key Stage 4 key performance measures used to evaluate and compare with the full range of achievement within and across Local Authorities were set out in the report. The Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh first language and mathematics and the capped point score are particularly important and Welsh Government (WG) publishes Local Authority benchmarks based on these each year.

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that the final 2016 results indicate mixed performance, but there were increases in Level 2 threshold, Welsh 1st language and Mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold inclusive of English/Welsh first language and mathematics has improved slightly from 52.6% in 2015 to 53.0% in 2016. There were increases in Welsh and Mathematics, but all subjects remain below the national average. Science has decreased from 86.9 to 81.3 and that is a significant drop. Comparisons in relation to gender differences and the Performance of Free School Meals/non Free School Meals Pupils were discussed.

It was explained that in terms of the Welsh Government modelled expectation for Free School Meals entitlement, the gap between the LA benchmarks for performance increased in 2016, with the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics 2.1 percentage points below the expected achievement. For capped point score Caerphilly widened the gap to 13.3 points below the expected achievement, similar to 2014.

An overview was provided in relation to the performance data recorded for Key Stage 5 regarding A Level Only and Level 3 Threshold which includes A Level and Vocational Qualifications. There was an increase of A levels graded as fail, in 2016 from 2015. This may suggest that some schools entered a small number of pupils for one or more A Levels, where an alternative vocational qualification may have been more appropriate.

Clarification was sought in relation to the key barriers faced for Key Stage 4 and 5. Members were advised that the Authority is looking to strengthen key departments and this year funding has been made available for the recruitment of a pool of Mathematics, English and Welsh Teachers. It is intended that they will offer an out of hours team operating on weekends and during holiday periods and interviews will take place shortly. A regional event is underway for teachers to work together. Developing communications with parents is considered key. Funding has also been made available to transport pupils to revision classes.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

14. EDUCATION CAPITAL 2017/18

This report was deferred to the next meeting.

Had the report been presented then Councillor C. Gordon would have declared an interest in this item as he is a School Governor at the Bryn Primary School and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association) would have declared an interest in this item as he is the Chair of Governors at Blackwood Comprehensive School and Vice Chair of Pontllanfraith Primary School.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 7th June 2017 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR