



SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 14TH MARCH 2017 AT 5.30PM.**

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, H.R. Davies, C. Gordon, M.P. James, Mrs. P. Marsden, D. Rees, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Simmonds.

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

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Interim Head of Service, Education), J. Elias (Service Manager – ALN), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), E. Sullivan (Scrutiny Officer), A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: Mr M. Barry and Mrs J. Havard (NUT)
A. Williams (Principal Challenge Advisor – EAS)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Johnston, Mrs G.D. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece, J. Pritchard (Vice-Chair), Mrs M.E. Sargent and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT), Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governors),

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J. Simmonds declared an interest in relation to agenda item 10 at the commencement of the meeting. Details of which are recorded with the respective item.

3. 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.

4. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER

Councillor D. Havard (Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning) delivered his statement that provided Members with an update on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Tests 2015, the results of which were published in December 2016. Wales' schools system has been ranked the worst in the UK in the 2016 international PISA tests. Results from tests taken by 15-year-olds across Wales for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) survey of standards across the globe show that Wales are adrift of the global and UK average in reading, maths and science. The tests were taken by half a million students representing 28 million 15-year-olds across 72 countries. The UK as a whole ranks 15th overall and Wales comes in just below halfway down the tables.

The Cabinet Member referred to the response of Kirsty Williams (Cabinet Secretary for Education – Welsh Government) in relation to the results who stated 'we can all agree we are not yet where we want to be'. Last month she sought advice from OECD to look at how we are doing in Wales. The advice was unambiguous but was *to stay the course, be brave, you are doing the right things*. Ms Williams advised that hard work is underway. There are plans in place to develop an excellent professional workforce, a new curriculum and the introduction of robust qualifications that will be nationally and internationally respected. PISA may divide opinion, but it is the recognised international benchmark for skills.

Clarification was sought in relation to the world wide indicator and the fact that Wales has failed to improve since 2006. Officers explained that they consider this is not a true record in Wales. The message from Welsh Government is that this is the measure to use and there must be skills alignment between PISA and GCSE specifications. Authorities need to follow the advice and consider available research. Head teachers have struggled with the PISA results but are coming on board and connecting with the measure.

Councillor Havard was pleased to inform Members that HRH The Duchess of Cambridge visited two Action for Children Projects in South Wales on 22nd February 2017 in her role as Patron of the Charity. She also visited the Family Intervention Team (FIT) and met children and families who have received support from the service, local dignitaries, local partners including health, education and domestic abuse services.

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that Caerphilly Library Service were big winners at the Marketing Excellence Awards 2017 Ceremony recently held in the National Library in Aberystwyth. The Service was highly commended Demonstrating Marketing Excellence and Joint Marketing Project of the Year (Dementia Friends Scheme) and colleagues won Marketing Champion of the Year.

Members were informed that Estyn recently hosted an awards evening recognising excellence in education and training in Wales. In particular the work of providers who received an overall inspection judgement of 'excellent' in the academic year 2015-2016. These included Cwmfelinfach Primary School and Gilfach Fargoed Primary School. Representatives from these providers were presented with a framed certificate recognising the hard work and commitment that lies behind achieving an 'excellent' inspection judgement and were congratulated by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector and Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his informative report.

5. 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.

6. EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer 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 Scrutiny Committee were advised that no additional reports had been requested by Members and that any new requests will be discussed at the Scrutiny workshops scheduled for July 2017.

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 work programme appended to the report be approved.

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. EDUCATION CAPITAL 2017-18

The Interim Head of Service for Education introduced the report that updated Members on proposals for the 2017/18 Education Capital Programme which are planned to be considered by Cabinet on the 15th March 2017. The report identifies proposals for the allocation of Education capital budgets for the 2017/18 financial year in the context of the 3 year capital programme 2016/17 – 2018/19.

The Scrutiny Committee was reminded that Special Council, at its meeting on 24th February 2016, considered a medium term financial strategy 2016/17-2018/19. This included a 3 year forward capital programme for Education. The detailed proposals in terms of accommodation requirements, asset management, strategy, health and safety, school security and school boiler Replacement Programme were set out in the report. It was explained that the proposals in their entirety would commit virtually all of the available budget before the commencement of the next financial year. To provide for in-year requests for funding it is recommended to fund £100,000 from LMS contingency to supplement this 50/50 budget.

A Member queried what would happen if a school encountered a crisis and was informed that the Authority would look to use funds from the following year's budget. A determination of priorities would be made by Building Control and a judgement call would be made if this related to a health and safety issue. Each school has had a detailed condition survey undertaken and priority has been given to schools with highest priority works and those with the highest 25 year maintenance liabilities.

Another Member asked if consideration had been given to off-site car parking at Ystrad Mynach Primary School as they felt there were health and safety problems in terms of traffic around the school. Members were advised that the Interim Chief Executive set up a School Strategy Board that routinely looks at requests from schools. It was confirmed the Board had not received any correspondence raising issues from this school.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands (and in noting there was 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the proposals to utilise the Education Capital Budget for 2017/18 as outlined in the report which will be reported to Cabinet, at its meeting on 15th March 2017 be noted;
- (ii) the proposal to supplement the 50/50 budget with a £100,000 contribution from the LMS contingency to support in-year bids be supported.

9. SCHOOL CATEGORISATION 2016-17

The Chief Education Officer informed Members of the national school categorisation system and Caerphilly school categorisation. Members were presented with information outlining the National Categorisation System and how schools in Caerphilly have been categorised for support this year.

The National School Categorisation System, which is a system that covers both primary and secondary schools was introduced in September 2014. Brought together, the Programme for Government commitment to introduce a primary school banding system. This builds on the improvements already achieved by secondary school banding. It was explained that this system is not purely data-driven, it also takes into account the quality of leadership and teaching and learning in schools. The system evaluates and assesses schools and places them in a support category using a range of performance measures provided by the Welsh Government. These include robust self-evaluation by the school of its capacity to improve in relation to leadership, teaching and learning and an assessment of the school's self-evaluation by challenge advisers in the regional consortia, agreed with the local authority.

An overview was provided in relation to the three steps of the system that are set out in the report, namely:

- Step One: generates a judgement about standards. The Welsh Government places each school in one of four numerical groups (1-4) related to performance against the agreed measures for primary and secondary schools, with schools in Standards Group 1 being the highest and schools in Standards Group 4 the lowest.
- Step Two: Self-evaluation and capacity to self-improve in relation to leadership and teaching and learning
- Step 3: The Categorisation and level of support, challenge and intervention

The outcomes of step one and step two will be combined to determine the school's support category (step three of the process). The final categorisation will be based on a colour coding system and this will be discussed with the school and agreed with the local authority. The categorisation colour indicates the level of support a school requires: green, yellow, amber or red (with the schools in the green category needing the least support and those in the red category needing the most intensive support). Each school will receive a tailored programme of support, challenge and intervention based on this category. The support category along with the outcomes for step one and step two are published annually on the My Local School website (<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk>).

The Scrutiny Committee were advised of the categorisation of Caerphilly schools as set out in paragraph 4.17 in the report. Reference was made to the journey of Caerphilly (appended to the report), that presents a positive picture. In terms of profile, there is a healthy primary

school phase and the secondary school phase is improving.

Clarification was sought in relation to how the Local Authority becomes involved with improvement. Members were advised that none of the schools involved are cause for concern and none have disputed the categorisation, as no appeals had been received. The requirements for reaching each of the colour coding was explained and it is felt this system allows for ambition.

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.

10. NEWBRIDGE SCHOOL SPECIALIST RESOURCE BASE

Councillor J. Simmonds declared a prejudicial interest in this item as he is a Governor at the School and left the room whilst the item was presented.

The Service Manager for ALN introduced the report that provided Members with an update following notification from the Governing Body of Newbridge School that they no longer wished to host the Behaviour Specialist Resource Base (SRB) at the school. The local authority, in line with statutory guidance included in the School Organisation Code 2013, sought approval from Cabinet to proceed with the consultation to close the SRB, details of which were appended to the report. An amended consultation timeline was agreed by Cabinet in order to accommodate a request by Scrutiny Committee to discuss the proposal.

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that following Cabinet approval to proceed with the consultation to close the SRB at Newbridge School, a consultation paper (appended to the report) was circulated to a number of consultees on 23rd January 2017. The consultation paper includes sections on the background to the proposal, the basis for the proposal and the educational case for closing the SRB in Newbridge School. The consultation closed at 5pm on 7th March 2017 and a consultation report will be written which will include responses from consultees. Cabinet are scheduled to consider the results of the consultation on 12th April 2017. If Cabinet agree to proceed, a statutory notice will be published providing a twenty eight day notice period for objections. If objections are received the local authority must publish an objection report, which would be presented to Cabinet for their consideration. Following this Cabinet would be required to make a final decision on the proposal.

Members raised concerns in relation to the existing pupils within the base and queried their future outcomes. It was explained there is a range of alternative provision available via the framework and procurement process. The Service Manager reassured the Scrutiny Committee that a detailed consultation was undertaken with pupils and parents. Some pupils have already moved to a new provision with 4 remaining that will be transitioned to their new bases prior to the summer holidays. Private providers are used in a limited capacity, although the preference is to keep children local.

A Member queried how many children there are across the borough that are awaiting placement. The Chief Education Officer informed Members that children are put forward for a Panel to decide if up-routing a child from mainstream education is the right decision for the child. This is a complex area and the right decision needs to be made that can cater for the child's needs. The need is increasing as is the complexity. Figures will be distributed to the Committee following the meeting.

Clarification was sought as to the future of existing staff within the SRB and the committee were advised that schools hosting SRB's are allocated a sum of money to run and manage the provision. Staff for the SRBs are appointed and employed by the school and paid for via this funding allocation. If a SRB provision is closed this results in the funding being withdrawn. Staff employed by the school within the SRB would then move onto the main

school staffing structure.

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.

11. FAMILIES FIRST PROGRAMME RE-COMMISSIONING

The Early Years Manager presented the report that provides information on the proposed structure of Families First in Caerphilly from 1st April 2017.

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that Families First is a Welsh Government funded programme, run in all Local Authorities across Wales. It is an early intervention/prevention Programme which supports families with a variety of needs. Each Local Authority shapes the Programme based on local need. Many contracts from the Caerphilly Families First commissioned projects will expire on 31st March 2017. Therefore, Families First needed to go through a re-commissioning process, considering the needs of families in Caerphilly and structuring the Programme accordingly.

It was explained that Families First held an online consultation and Needs Analysis workshop to consult with citizens and practitioners. On 2nd August 2016, Welsh Government issued new guidance from the Cabinet Secretary regarding the future of Families First, details of which were appended to the report. The focus of the strategic projects commissioned through the programme will be narrowed to concentrate on the delivery of parenting support and support for young people.

The Families First Board agreed nine key areas and commissioning panels were set up with relevant, internal staff (to meet financial regulations requirements in regard to partner involvement) to agree specifications for external and internal contracts. The main Families First tender, joint with Flying Start, consisted of six lots. Five of these lots were for new projects within the Families First Programme from 1st April 2017. The contracts are for an initial two years, with an option to extend for a further two years.

Two additional tenders will be advertised before the new financial year, around the themes of Mental Health/Wellbeing and Financial Literacy. Service Level Agreements will also be made with internal departments to deliver new projects. Three existing projects – Parent Forum, Children and Young People’s Advocacy and Domestic Abuse Floating Support will be extended due to different commissioning timeframes.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the well written and presented report and for responding to questions raised during the course of the debate.

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.

The meeting closed at 8.00 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