



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH JUNE 2017 AT 5.30PM.

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chair
Councillor G.D. Oliver - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, A. Collis, S. Cook, A. Farina-Childs, B. Miles, Mrs T. Parry, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, R. Whiting.

Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement: Councillor P. Marsden.

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Interim Head of Service – Education, Planning, Strategy and Resources), A. Wyburn (Solicitor), A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Education Achievement Service (EAS): Kirsty Bevan (Assistant Director - Challenge Advisors), Andrew Williams (Principal Challenge Advisor).

Co-opted Members: Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governor), Mrs P.J. Ireland (NUT), Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan).

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member and the newly elected Members to their first Scrutiny Committee.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.T. Hardacre, D. Havard and M.P. James, J. Havard (NUT), Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr M. Barry (Parent Governor).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors C. Andrews and A. Farina-Childs declared an interest In relation to Agenda Item 10 – Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2017-2020. Details of which are recorded with the respective item.

4. MINUTES – 27TH FEBRUARY 2017

RESOLVED that subject to it being recorded that Councillor J. Bevan is a Governor at Abertysswg and Bryn Awel Primary Schools and no longer a Governor at Rhymney Comprehensive School and J. Havard (NUT) was not in attendance at the meeting although her attendance had been recorded, the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 27th February 2017 (minute nos 1 – 14) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. MINUTES – 14TH MARCH 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 14th March 2017 (minute nos 1 - 11) 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 P. Marsden (Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement) addressed the Scrutiny Committee and stated it was a privilege to become Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement and looked forward to working with Members, Officers and Colleagues in moving forward.

She congratulated Jayne Price and the team at Cwmaber Infants School who have recently achieved the National Quality Award - Healthy Schools Accreditation and Sharon Pascoe and the pupils of Fochriw Primary School who attended the South East Wales network meeting to present their achievements to Public Health Wales.

An update was provided in relation to Library Services with details of an exciting new project in development which is a joint venture with the Family Information Service. The concept is to adapt the existing toddler sessions to include basic coding to tie in with the digital curriculum and help prepare children with essential school readiness skills. The library team will be training staff and parents at all 39 childcare providers registered to deliver flying start and early year's education.

The Youth Service, Young Parents Project has been shortlisted for the 2017 National Youth Work Excellence Award. The Young Parents project works with young parents aged 13-25, providing support to overcome barriers and tackle challenges they face as young people and as young parents.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to announce that over the next few weeks pupils and teachers will move into their brand new £25.5 million Islwyn High School. The impressive three storey building, creatively designed by the council's Building Consultancy Team, is to become the permanent home for pupils of the former Pontllanfraith and Oakdale Comprehensive Schools.

Works also continue at a pace on the construction of a state-of-the-art replacement primary school in the Upper Rhymney Valley. The council is currently at the final stage of a consultation process to establish a Rhymney 3 -18 school with effect from 1st January 2018. The single storey development will consist of a Primary School, a Nursery and a Flying Start Unit. The school will also boast an 'Integrated Children's Centre' offering childcare provision. This is expected to support Flying Start part time places, as well as deliver 'wraparound' and after-school provision for working parents and to help support economically inactive parents to return to work.

Blackwood Comprehensive School is currently working with the council on a two-year improvement project, funded by 21st Century Schools. This exciting project will see vast improvements made to the school buildings and facilities in order to provide pupils and teachers with a fit for purpose environment for teaching and learning.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his report.

A Member suggested that as Islwyn High School will be opened at the end of June 2017 that a site visit be arranged. This was supported by the Committee and arrangements would be made following the meeting.

8. 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 June 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. Officers requested that the Budget Monitoring scheduled for the 11th July meeting be deferred and replaced with Grants and Financial Plan and this was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee. In terms of the Education Safeguarding Update scheduled for the same meeting, a Member suggested that it may be helpful to invite a Head Teacher to this meeting and the Chief Education Officer confirmed she would arrange this.

Members were encouraged to attend the Education for Life Scrutiny Forward Work Programme Workshops scheduled on the 17th July 2017, to consider the programme for the following 12 months.

Following consideration and discussion and subject to the foregoing 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 Budget Monitoring scheduled for the 11th July meeting be deferred and replaced with Grants and The Financial Plan, the work programme appended to the report be approved.

9. 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.

10. EAS BUSINESS PLAN

Councillor C. Andrews declared an interest in this item as she is Vice-Chair of Governors at Heolddu Comprehensive School. Councillor A. Farina-Childs declared an interest as he is the Vice-Chair of Governors of Blackwood Comprehensive School. As the interests were personal, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

The Chief Education Officer introduced the report that updated Members on the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2017-2020 and the Caerphilly specific Annex (April 1st 2017 - March 31st 2018) which is focused upon the specific areas that require improvement within Caerphilly schools. EAS are required to submit their Business Plan to Welsh Government and Cabinet are required to endorse it.

The Assistant Director (Challenge Advisors – EAS) then set out the key elements within the report. The plan sets out the priorities, programmes and outcomes to be achieved by the EAS on behalf of the South East Wales Consortium. The report also focuses upon the expected outcomes in Caerphilly and the specific programmes that will be implemented during 2017-2018, Details of which are contained in the Local Authority (LA) Annex (appended to the report).

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that the South East Wales Consortium is required to submit to the Welsh Government (WG) a three-year Business Plan that will be updated annually. This is the fourth iteration of the plan first submitted in 2013.

Clarification was sought in terms of improvement in Key Stage 4 this year. The Committee were advised that although this is a regional plan the EAS has continued to strengthen systems and processes to continue to improve pupil outcomes as a result of ongoing evaluation and the slow progress noted in 2016. Examples were provided in terms of strengthening quality assurance processes around progress towards target submissions and the realignment of the work of secondary subject specialist for English, Welsh and Maths. The delivery of bespoke support packages to schools based upon need and the introduction of a strategy for raising aspiration for more able learners and those challenged by poverty was also discussed.

A Member queried if regional key stage targets are variable and was informed that this depends on individual schools as targets are based on Welsh Government modelled estimates. In moving forward, the Local Authority will have the ability to impose targets. Targets are published annually (Autumn) and EAS are currently working with the software company for earlier target setting to be made available.

Members sought clarification as to whether the Business Plan takes into account the content/context of Caerphilly Schools. Reference was made to the Caerphilly Annex (appended to the report) that looks at what can be done between EAS and the Local Authority between Key Stage 2 and 3. The Annex reflects the challenges faced. In concluding, the Chief Education Officer advised that in terms of performance indicators the Local Authority along with Schools need to be mindful of the culture change.

The Chair thanked the Officers for responding to questions raised during the course of the debate.

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

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the impact of the plan for communities within the local authority area and the priorities contained within the Business Plan and the Annex be noted;

- (ii) the EAS Business Plan be referred to Cabinet for endorsement, prior to its submission to Welsh Government.

11. THE DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2016/17 AND THE PRIORITIES FOR 2017/18.

The Chief Education Officer and the Interim Head of Service – Education, Planning, Strategy and Resources presented the report that informed Members of the Directorate's performance for the financial year 2016/17 and the priorities for the financial year 2017/18. The report also considers one of the Council's five Well-being Objectives for 2017/18, "*Improve outcomes for all learners, particularly those vulnerable to underachievement*".

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that a review of the Directorate's performance for 2016/17 has been undertaken as part of the Council's corporate planning process. Reference was made to the self-evaluation process and taking account of the Council's priorities, that were introduced by the Council in 2014. The Directorate agreed 8 service priorities for 2016/17 and 6 priority themes proposed for 2017/18. Details of which were appended to the report.

Reference was made to the Annual Service Plan and Members were advised that for the first time Officers are meeting with pupils to provide a combined focus on improving standards. During 2016/17 a modest improvement was reported in terms of Standards. The categorisation and inspection profiles were more positive, the new post for School Improvement has been appointed and Secondary Head Teachers agreed a two year plan for Key Stage 4. The Chief Education Officer confirmed that she along with the Chief Executive will meet with all Head Teachers to ascertain what the Local Authority can do in terms of support. Exclusions and referrals are rising in Caerphilly and it was confirmed that Officers are working closely with Schools to reduce numbers.

A Member queried the reduction in visits to Libraries in the last year. It was suggested that this could be due to a number of factors including changes to opening times and Ystrad Mynach Library was closed for two months due to refurbishment. The service anticipated a ten per cent decrease in visits however the result was close to eighteen per cent. On a positive note, the digital service has been promoted and figures have increased to approximately two thousand downloads.

Clarification was sought in terms of managing challenging behaviours. The Committee were advised that there are a variety of challenging behaviours including substance misuse. Behaviour will always be an issue and two working groups have been set up from each cluster of schools. The groups consist of fourteen members of staff and they have decided on three models that will deliver recommendations to this Scrutiny Committee in moving forward.

Members queried how attendance levels can be improved. Reference was made to the presentation that was delivered to the Scrutiny Committee last year, by the Head Teacher of Hengoed Primary School that set out their approach in relation to attendance. The presentation has since been delivered to other schools across the Caerphilly Borough. It is intended that the newly appointed Strategic Lead for School Improvement will prepare a report on what can be achieved collectively, drawing in good practices.

In terms of Band B (2019-2024) funding, clarification was sought in relation to the process. It was explained that there is limited information available as this project is in the early stages, however the key driver for Welsh Government (WG) Band B funding will be condition of building. The Local Authority will need to outline initial proposals to WG by 31st July 2017.

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

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the review progress and performance against agreed outcomes, future priorities and recommendations, be noted;
- (ii) the content of the report be agreed and the judgement of 'partially successful' at the full year stage in respect of the Improvement Objective Assessment, be noted.

The meeting closed at 7:40pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2017 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR