



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON MONDAY, 13TH JANUARY 2020 AT 5.30PM.

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry - Chair

Councillors:

A. Collis, W. David, A. Farina-Childs, B. Miles, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Simmonds and R. Whiting.

Councillor B. Jones (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement).

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), C. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), J. Southcombe (Finance Manager - Education, Lifelong Learning and Schools), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), P. O'Neil (Senior Youth Service Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr M. Barry and Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governors) and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative).

E. Pryce - Education Achievement Service (EAS).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Andrews (Vice-Chair), P.J. Bevan, S. Cook, D.T. Hardacre, D. Havard, M.P. James, Mrs G.D. Oliver and Mrs P.J. Ireland and Ms J. Havard (NUT).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor W. David declared an interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to Agenda Item 8 – Performance Management, Details are recorded with the respective item.

3. MINUTES – 5TH NOVEMBER 2019 AND 9TH DECEMBER 2019

The minutes for both meetings had been omitted from the agenda pack and will be included at the next meeting scheduled for the 24th February 2020, for the Committee's approval.

4. 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.

5. EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined the draft Education Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme from January to June 2020. Members were asked to consider the work programme and make any amendments or propose any additional items to be included for future meetings. It was suggested that the EOTAS (Education Other Than at School) Strategy be scheduled for the meeting on the 24th February 2020 and the Library Standards report currently scheduled for that meeting, be moved to the meeting on the 31st March 2020. In addition, Key Stage 5 will be added to the meeting on the 31st March 2020. A Member requested a report in respect of Service Level Agreements (SLA's) that will outline the full-range of SLAs with Education and their associated costs to schools. It was suggested and agreed that this report should come to the Committee as an Information Item at a date to be confirmed.

Following consideration and discussion, Members unanimously agreed that the Forward Work Programme appended to the report be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was noted that 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. KEY STAGE 4 PERFORMANCE - DECEMBER 2019

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

Mr E. Pryce from EAS presented the report which provided Members with the final published 2019 performance data in respect of Key Stage 4. He advised that Welsh Government has been developing new evaluation and improvement arrangements to replace parts of the current accountability system. These arrangements have been co-constructed with colleagues in schools, Estyn, local government, regional consortia, and taken international research into consideration. They have been carefully developed to ensure that they align with and help support the realisation of the new curriculum and associated reforms. The new arrangements will support the aim of raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and delivering an education system that is a source of national pride and public confidence.

The arrangements are based on four key principles namely, fair, coherent, proportionate and transparent and over the next three years, there will be an evolving programme of future developments, making the transition between the current system and the future plans. Members noted the new measures, based on points scores that are designed to remove the historic emphasis on the Level 2 threshold measure and the narrow focus on borderline C/D grade learners. Instead, they reflect a school average of all individual learners' points' scores, rather than a percentage attaining a minimum threshold level. A guidance document has been produced for reporting against the interim Key Stage 4 School Performance Arrangement which commenced in September 2019. It was explained that there is an

expectation that local authorities and regional consortia support schools to make appropriate decisions about their curriculum to avoid narrowing choice for learners. Members were referred to paragraph 5.15 in the report that sets out the interim performance measure which are all based on points scores. In respect of the Capped 9 Measure, 3 new areas/slots have been set which are literacy, numeracy and Science. Some examples of the type of questions schools should be asking when looking at the data provided were discussed. Members discussed the comparisons of the key indicators for Wales as a whole and a regional overview of performance for the new interim measures. Also, a regional overview of performance for the Capped 9 only, split by Free School Meals (FSM)/non FSM was discussed. It was noted that meaningful evaluation of the outcomes at individual school levels will take place across the autumn term in dialogue between Local Authorities, EAS and school leaders. Support for individual schools will also continue to be provided in line with the National Categorisation system.

A Member commented that the tables set out in the report are very informative and useful however, expressed concerns in respect of the cluster at the bottom of the table at paragraph 5.33. Officers advised that the overall context of the table is important and to note and that Islwyn High and St Cenydd Comprehensive in particular have Additional Learning Needs (ALN's) bases within their schools that cover the whole authority.

The Chair thanked Mr Pryce for presenting his report and responding to questions 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.

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Councillor W. David declared an interest in relation to this item as his daughter claims the Working Family Child Care Offer. As the interest was personal and not prejudicial he was not required to leave the meeting when the report was presented and could take part in the debate and vote.

Officers from the Education Department presented the report and delivered a presentation which provides a focus on the management of performance within the Education Directorate. This profile includes the 6 month mid-year performance of the Wellbeing Objective 1: Improve Education Opportunities for All for 2019-20 in the 5 year Corporate Wellbeing Plan 2018-2023; the final progress of the Education Service Improvement Plan January – December 2019 and progress to date of the Shared Ambitions Strategy.

The Committee were advised that there are 8 action areas comprising 29 actions under Wellbeing Objective 1, 4 of which have been completed and the others are making good progress. There is a clear alignment between the Wellbeing Objective actions and those actions in the Service Improvement Plan and the Shared Ambitions Strategy.

Members discussed Action Area 1 - The aim to reduce the impact of poverty in early years and the Childcare Offer for working parents of 3-4 year olds in part time Foundation Phase. It was noted that this has increased in popularity, with consistently high application rate and high numbers of placements saving the parents in Caerphilly on the whole on average £250,000 per month. It was explained that in terms of the number of Childcare Offer Placements, the figure of 1096 represents the total number of places per term. In total the take up is approximately 85% which is meeting current demand. A Member referred to Action Area 5 - Support learning that enables young and adult employment opportunities and questioned how dependent the Local Authority is in respect of European funding. The Officer advised that there are risks associated, however the current funding is guaranteed until 2022.

Employability has been so successful due to the funding streams received and it is hoped that Welsh Government would provide funding for future programmes. Clarification was also provided in that there is no upper age limit for people supported into employment by the Bridges into Work 2 Programme.

The Chair thanked the Officers for delivering the report and presentation 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.

RESOLVED that the content of the report and the progress made, be noted.

9. SCHOOL BALANCES - AN OVERVIEW

The Finance Manager for Education, Lifelong Learning and Schools presented the report which provided Members with an overview of the school balances (reserves) position across Wales and a more detailed update on the position of Caerphilly schools. There has been a significant change in the level of school balances over the last 5 financial years (2014-15 to 2018-19). There is also a very different picture between the primary and secondary sector. It was noted that the data included within the report relates only to prior financial years.

The Committee were advised that Welsh Government publishes annual data (October) on school reserves and the information is available on their website – “Stats Wales”. The latest information published is for financial year 2018-19 and this data provides a snap shot of school reserves as at 31st March 2019 and details are set out in paragraph 5.1.2 in the report and summarised in Appendix 1. It was explained that the position for Caerphilly is slightly distorted over the period reported due to the difficulty experienced by Cwmcarn High School and the subsequent decision by the schools Governing Body (27th June 2016) to seek to close the school. Further details are set out in paragraph 5.2.1. in the report. A full list of Caerphilly school reserves, as at 31st March 2019, are included in Appendix 5 (this includes details from 1st April 2017).

Members discussed the report and were pleased to note that so many Schools in Caerphilly ended with a balanced budget as at 31st March 2019. Officers advised that this was down to a number of reasons which include levels of grant funding, issues with building maintenance and there are different circumstance for different schools. She added that the Collaboration and Federation of Schools has benefitted a number of schools financially and there is a need to continue to be proactive in this regard moving forward. In terms of sixth form funding, it was explained that this is received from and allocated by Welsh Government.

The Chair thanked the Officer for delivering the 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 7.20pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2020 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR