



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON MONDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY 2020 AT 5.30PM.

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry – Chair
Councillors C. Andrews (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, A. Collis, S. Cook, A. Farina-Childs, B. Miles, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis and R. Whiting.

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

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), A. West (21st Century Schools Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: R. Morgan (Parent Governor Representative) and M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative).

Mrs P.J. Ireland (NEU).

E. Pryce - Education Achievement Service (EAS).

G. Jones – Wales Audit Office (WAO).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors W. David, D. Havard, D.T. Hardacre, M.P. James, Mrs G.D. Oliver and J. Simmonds, Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association) and Mr M. Barry (Parent Governor Representative).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared interests at the commencement of the meeting: J. Roberts and C. Andrews in relation to Agenda Item 9 - Schools Capital Programme 2020/21 and C. Andrews and P.J. Bevan in relation to Agenda Item 10 - Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Strategy. Details of which are recorded with the respective items.

3. MINUTES – 5TH NOVEMBER 2019

The minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee held on the 5th November 2019 were approved as a correct record. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

4. MINUTES – 9TH DECEMBER 2019

The minutes of the Special Education Scrutiny Committee held on the 9th December 2019 were approved as a correct record. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

5. MINUTES – 13TH JANUARY 2020

The minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee held on the 13th January 2020 were approved as a correct record. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

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. EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report which outlined the draft Education Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme from February to May 2020. 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 advised that representatives from the Youth Forum will be attending the next Education Scrutiny Committee on the 31st March 2020. Members were reminded that Youth Forum representatives attended both Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committees during 2019 to identify their priority issues. The issues identified were Mental Health Support and raising awareness of Drug and Alcohol Support for Young People in the County Borough.

It was noted that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee have invited the Youth Forum representatives to observe their next meeting on the 17th March 2020. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board will be delivering a presentation at that meeting and have been asked to provide an overview of both priorities identified and the demands and challenges faced in those areas and to set out plans they have in moving forward. Members were invited to observe the Social Services Scrutiny Committee where the priority issues would be discussed.

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT OF THE FLYING START PROGRAMME

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

The report informed Members that during Spring 2019, Wales Audit Office (WAO) conducted an examination of the step in Objective 1 of the Caerphilly CBC Wellbeing Plan. The conclusion demonstrated many positive examples and areas for improvement which were incorporated into the Education Service Improvement Plan under the Early Years Operational Plan 2019.

Members were assured that this exercise was not a review of the Flying Start Programme. The Wales Audit Office (WAO) conducted an examination of how the Caerphilly CBC Wellbeing Plan acted in accordance with the sustainable development principles (five ways of working), which was developed in response to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Wellbeing Objective 1, to Improve Education Opportunities for All. Of which, Increase the access, take up and attendance of the Flying Start Programme was the first step. It was noted that the WAO conducted field work interviewing strategic and operational delivery partners as well as conducting workshops with professionals and parents involved in delivery of the programme. The Committee discussed the WAO conclusions that were set out in paragraph's 5.4 to 5.9 in the report and noted the updated progress contained within the action plan.

The examination found that in taking the appropriate steps and acting in accordance with the Flying Start Programme, the Council has a number of positive examples of how it has taken account of the sustainable development principle, particularly in collaboration and prevention. However, the Council recognises that there is more to do to consistently embed all five ways of working and could strengthen its involvement to secure increased take up and attendance and ensure that it is working in a fully integrated way.

A Member sought clarification in respect of the longer term benefits the Flying Start Programme can bring to families and how the use of public resources can be maximised. Officers explained that early intervention is key and prevention is an inherent part of the Flying Start Programme and the Council has tailored its approach to the local population. This can also be achieved by working collaboratively with internal departments, the Health Board and other agencies. Officers also highlighted the benefits of better links being created since the examination taking place. An example was provided where Employment Mentors work with parents to improve and provide consistent pathways in moving forward. The Chair requested an updated report as to the progress of the Action Plan later in 2020.

The Chair thanked the Officers for delivering the report and for responding to questions 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 content of this report, presentation by Wales Audit Office as well as the progress made since the WAO report, be noted.

9. EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE (EAS) BUSINESS PLAN (2020-2021) and LOCAL AUTHORITY ANNEX 2020-2021

The report sought Members' consideration of the draft EAS Business Plan 2020-2021 and the Local Authority Annex 2020-2021, as part of the regional consultation process, prior to their presentation to Cabinet on 11th March, 2020. Through this activity Members will ensure that the plan enables appropriate support for schools to improve and that all pupils reach their potential across Caerphilly.

Members were advised that the EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan with accompanying annexes for each of the five Local Authorities (LA's). The Scrutiny Committee noted that the Business Plan sets out how the EAS plans to deliver school improvement services across all schools, pupil referral units and funded non-maintained nursery settings on behalf of each Local Authority. The plan sets out how LA's will be supported to deliver their statutory function, by addressing their individual improvement priorities and promoting improved pupil outcomes.

The Business Plan priorities have been derived from LA strategic plans, progress from the previous business plan and areas identified through self-evaluation and external research. The Scrutiny Committee were advised of the strengths and areas for development within Caerphilly which are detailed in the LA Annex, which can be aligned to the provision of LA services to ensure that all pupils meet their full potential.

Members sought clarification in respect of the terminology used in the business plan for targets. The scrutiny committee were advised that these terms are based on Estyn reporting, and that 'Nearly All' refers to 95% and above, 'Majority' meaning over 60%.

Scrutiny Committee Members asked if there were negative impacts upon schools where staff provides peer learning support to other schools. Members were advised that the key factor in mitigating impact upon schools is for this to be planned in advance. This allows schools to use the funding from the EAS to recruit or backfill posts. Officers advised that the LEA are also aware of the potential impact and will ensure, through their monthly meetings, that support provided is not at the expense of the school providing the peer support. In some instances schools can mitigate impact by not timetabling a class for a teacher, who is providing support elsewhere.

Members sought assurance that the key driver for the reduction in EAS challenge advisors and an increase in peer learners was financial as opposed to it being the best model. The Scrutiny Committee were informed that Challenge Advisers needed a range of current skills and a thorough knowledge of the role of the Headteacher. The best serving headteachers are well placed to fulfil this role. There is no financial benefit to the EAS as the costs of delivery remain the same. Instead of paying staff salary directly, the funding is transferred to schools whose headteachers undertake the work. There is also an additional benefit to those staff who subsequently backfill or deputise allowing them to grow and develop their skills and experience. However, it was acknowledged that it is important for Governors, the EAS and the LA, to ensure that a balance is struck when deciding whether to release a member of staff, to ensure that it is the right time for both the school and the member of staff.

The Scrutiny Committee commented that it would be helpful if they could be provided with a breakdown in respect of Caerphilly for the 'Summary of Progress 2019/20' detailed on page 11 of the draft Business Plan and also would like to receive the mid-year review of the plan going forward. The EAS commented that this reported had been submitted to the LA in November 2019. Members were assured that the minor formatting errors contained within the Business Plan would be corrected, and the LA's requirement to change the statements on exclusions data would be made for submission to Welsh Government.

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 for the reasons contained in the Officer's report:

- (i) Members' comments on the contents of the Business Plan as part of the consultation process are contained therein;
- (i) Members' comments as to the main strengths and areas for development within Caerphilly, as detailed in LA Annex and how the LA services can be

aligned to meet the ambitious targets within the Business Plan, ensuring all pupils meet their full potential are contained therein;

(ii) the comments from the Education Scrutiny Committee shall be presented to Cabinet on the 11th March 2020.

(iii)

10. SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/21

Councillor C. Andrews declared an interest in relation to this item as she is the Vice-Chair of Governors at Heolddu Comprehensive School. Councillor J. Roberts declared an interest in relation to this item as he is a School Governor at Ysgol Ifor Bach. As the interests were personal and not prejudicial both Members were not required to leave the report was presented and could take part in the debate and vote.

The report provided Members with details of the allocation of the 2020/21 Education Capital Programme and a breakdown of the Education Capital Budgets for the 2020/21 financial year, in the context of the 3 year Capital Programme 2020/21 – 2022/23. Members were advised that the proposed budget is subject to agreement by Special Council at its meeting on 20th February 2020.

The 21st Century Schools Manager summarised the report and provided details of the allocated funding for projects relating to Additional Accommodation, Asset Management, Health and Safety, School Security and School Boiler Replacements. She explained that Education colleagues have worked closely with both the Council's Health and Safety and Building Consultancy teams when determining the priority projects. Updated condition surveys have also been undertaken in relation to all school premises which have supported the team in identifying areas for prioritisation.

Members discussed the current adverse weather conditions and it was explained that information is currently being obtained from schools as to any damage caused as a result of the storms over the recent weeks.

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 content of the report, be noted.

11. EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL (EOTAS) STRATEGY

Councillor C. Andrews declared an interest in relation to this item as she is the link Governor for the Governing Body at Heolddu Comprehensive School and Learning Progress Centre. Councillor P.J. Bevan declared an interest in relation to this item as his daughter-in-law works in home tuition. As the interests were personal and not prejudicial both Members were not required to leave the room when the report was presented and could take part in the debate and vote.

The report outlined the Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Strategy, recently rebranded as 'Every Child's Entitlement' and sought Members' views prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 22nd April 2020.

Members were advised that the strategy appended to the report has been developed in consultation with schools. This strategy will be aligned to the Service Improvement Plan and other strategic documents. The aim is to provide a good quality service to young people, with an ambition that they should feel important and safe within their learning environment. The strategy contains a Passport and Guidebook for each child to support them to obtain both

their formal qualifications and also ensure they have emotional and wellbeing support. The ambition is to provide these children with the same outcomes as any other child.

The Scrutiny Committee were provided with assurance that there is already a good provision with a range of options from the Learning Centre, Home Schooling, Innovate Bases at Blackwood and Rhymney as well as the Learning Progress Centres based at Heolddu and Lewis School Pengam. The strategy outlines a collaborative approach with schools through outreach work and a Centre for Vulnerable Learners Hub and Bespoke Model.

Members sought clarification regarding the aim to reduce pupil numbers excluded from schools and if the strategy will still include the option to home school. It was stated that the numbers that are educated outside the school setting are too high, with many interventions possible in the school setting making removal from school unnecessary. In terms of home schooling Officers have been working with families to encourage a return to school but there has been limited success. A change in culture is needed with the new model having a potential to reduce home schooling by 50%. Members were advised that it is vitally important to maintain the links with the schools when children are excluded or home schooled in order to make a return to school easier.

Scrutiny Committee Members asked for detail of the impact of changing the use of WG Band B funding, for the purpose of supporting this strategy. Members were advised that Welsh Government guidelines have now shifted since the original Band B proposals were agreed. The revised guidelines are seeking transformational spending, which is the aim of this strategy. Members asked if this will impact school refurbishment projects and it was confirmed that additional funding will need to be identified for refurbishment spends. However, it was also clarified that the original Band B proposals did not specifically set out any potential refurbishment projects.

Members asked if details on the design of the Centre for Vulnerable Learners had been agreed and if Officers had considered examples of models elsewhere. It was clarified that no design has been carried out and it is important to understand exactly what the provision will need to look like as well as ensuring value for money. It is planned to look at other centres of excellence and ensure that the plans meet the needs in the longer term in line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations.

Members asked what the overall aim would be and were advised that it is to reduce exclusions, ensure that the wellbeing of the children is a key factor, consistency, communication and working with schools. It is hoped that the number of referrals will reduce once schools invest and although financial savings are not the driver; this strategy could mean that funding could be targeted more appropriately.

The Scrutiny Committee sought details on the differences between the support needed by primary and secondary schools. Members were advised that at present 10% of support is provided to primary and 90% to secondary. Members suggested that a shift towards providing earlier support at primary schools would help the pressures upon secondary schools. Feedback from Head Teachers also suggests that issues can be masked at a younger age and emerge when they move to secondary schools. Therefore, a new centre will allow the focus to shift and address issues at an earlier stage and the strategy can also support schools to manage within the school setting.

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 content of the report be noted, and the views of the Education Scrutiny Committee contained therein, be presented to Cabinet on the 22nd April 2020.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2020, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR