



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 5TH JULY 2022 AT 5.30PM

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry - Chair
Councillor J. Rao - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

E. M. Aldworth, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, A. Farina-Childs, C. Gordon, B. Miles, L. Phipps, M. Powell, J. E. Roberts, J. Winslade and K. Woodland.

Cabinet Member:

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities)

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), J. Southcombe (Finance Manger), E. Pryce (Assistant Director: Policy and Strategy, Education Achievement Service), J. Kent (Assistant Director: Curriculum, Education Achievement Service), S. Speedy (School Improvement Partner, Education Achievement Service), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and M. Afzal (Committee Services Officer).

Also present:

Co-opted Members: Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative), Mr G. James (Parent Governor Representative) and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

Also in Attendance:

Councillors: J. Pritchard and S. Morgan.

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting would be live-streamed and a recording made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items - [Click here to view](#). The Committee was advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Gair and M. P. James together with Mrs P. Ireland (NEU) and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 15TH FEBRUARY 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2022 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15th February 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined details of the Education Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period July 2022 to September 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15th February 2022. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of a roll call this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Education Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Councils' website.

6. TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER THE CABINET REPORTS LISTED ON THE AGENDA

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

7. UPDATE REPORT ON THE CURRICULUM FOR WALES

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update the Committee on the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales within schools across the county borough.

The requirement for all primary schools to introduce the Curriculum for Wales (2022) from September 2022 was noted. Members were advised that secondary schools had the

opportunity to opt into the curriculum or defer until September 2023, to provide greater time for preparation, due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was highlighted that the Curriculum for Wales provided schools with greater flexibility, with less prescribed content. This would give schools greater freedom to select approaches and contexts for learning that best suits the developmental needs of learners within each school's community.

Clarification on the qualification reforms was sought, with one Member querying progression opportunities for learners who did not study the new topics at GCSE level. It was confirmed that Natural Pathways would facilitate the progression into higher education.

With schools being given greater autonomy as part of the reforms, clarification on the composition of the new curriculum was sought. The Member was assured that despite the degree of flexibility in terms of the context for learning and teaching methods, knowledge and skills across the board/schools were to remain consistent.

Reference was made to 5.9 of the report – the decisions to combine Welsh language and literature for learners in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools. The Member queried whether the same changes would apply to the English GCSE. It was confirmed that arrangements had been made to combine English language and literature to give students greater choice in respect of selected pathways.

Further clarification on the changes was sought, with a Member querying whether the merger would reduce workloads for students. The Member was advised that although the changes would reduce guided learning hours, the option to select subjects from other aspects of the curriculum would increase variety in respect of topics. The Member was assured that an array of stakeholders had been consulted upon in respect of the decision to combine languages and it was hoped that the merger would lead to a greater uptake in traditionally marginalised subjects including international languages and the expressive arts.

A Member sought further information on the decision to combine language and literature and whether the merger would apply to Advanced Level qualifications (A-Levels). It was confirmed that the merger would apply to A-Levels. The Member was assured that the combining of languages was the best approach forward.

The Committee queried whether schools were expected to incorporate every aspect of the qualifications reforms or whether they were permitted to specialise in certain subjects due to the complexities surrounding the hiring of specialist subject teachers. It was advised that partnership work in respect of this area was underway across the borough to deliver the specialist subjects in a collaborative manner.

Clarification on section 5.12 of the report was sought, with one Member querying whether the Education Achievement Service (EAS) had received self-assessment reports, information Headteachers were requested to provide in the spring term of 2022. It was confirmed that the reports had been received and an update would be provided by members of the EAS.

In light of the critical situation with supply teachers, a query was raised in relation to the support for professional learning. It was confirmed that the EAS and local authorities would continue to facilitate access to professional learning and development to meet the needs of teachers and professionals across the region.

The EAS were referred to section 5.1 of the report which listed the schools that had opted to incorporate mandatory aspects of the new curriculum for pupils in year 7 from September 2022, and clarification on the schools that did not make it to the list was sought. Members were advised that schools were given the option by Welsh Government to take the additional time if they felt that they would benefit from it for planning purposes. The Committee was assured that pupils would not be placed at a disadvantage by the delayed implementation of the new curriculum.

A query was raised in respect of the support mechanisms in place to prevent duplication of errors in collaborative working. The Committee was advised that school improvement partners were on hand to mitigate any errors and work was being undertaken in conjunction with schools to ensure that educational institutions were acquiring meaningful knowledge from collaborative working. Members were assured that in spite of the possible errors, the advantages of partnership working outweighed its disadvantages.

Following consideration of the report, the Education Scrutiny Committee noted the contents.

8. SHARED AMBITIONS STRATEGY 2019-2022

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update the Committee on the outcome of the report completed on progress since the Peer Review in 2018. It was noted that the original peer review had been led by Aled Evans together with a team that consisted of three Directors of Education, one Assistant Director and Welsh Local Government Association representatives.

The review highlighted the priorities within the draft 'Shared Ambitions Strategy'. Mr Evans was commissioned again to conduct a review of the progress made since January 2019 and this was carried out between November 2021 and February 2022.

Reference was made to page 29 of the report which detailed the risk in respect of the authority not holding access to the information and intelligence on the performance and management of schools held by the consortium, and the Committee sought clarification on the measures in place to minimise this risk.

The Committee was advised that the information was accessible, and that work was underway to identify the best use of the information and the best method of storage. It was confirmed that a working group, comprised of head teachers, was due to commence a pilot in September to assess the self-evaluation of teachers. It was hoped that a report would detail the outcome of the pilot in the near future. The Committee was assured that the work in respect of access to information would increase transparency and clarity with headteachers and officers working on the project to combine the material.

Clarification on the support mechanisms for marginalised learners was sought. The Committee was advised that schools had policies in place and that headteachers were keen to engage with marginalised learners. Reference was made to Trinity Fields School & Resource Centre, an exceptionally challenging school and the sophisticated mechanisms it had in place to engage with disadvantaged groups. Headteachers were commended for their efforts and the collaborative work with Youth Service in respect of marginalised learners was noted. The Committee was advised that reports detailing the focus of the next stages were available for further information.

It was noted that the voices of pupils across Caerphilly were fed into the new strategy and the importance of having support mechanisms in place for marginalised learners was recognised by members of the Committee.

Clarification on the comments made by school leaders in respect of support for marginalised learners was sought. The Committee was advised that the comments derived from the high standards which schools had set themselves. Members were assured that schools across the borough were striving to foster inclusivity within their institutions.

A query was raised in relation to the comments made by Governors as part of the interview process, with the Committee seeking clarification on why governors did not feel a part of the priorities set out in the Shared Ambitions Strategy. The Committee was advised that a handful of Governors were consulted as part of the process. However, it was acknowledged that more work could have been undertaken to improve Governor engagement levels. The Committee

was assured that engagement levels had improved, and the Strategic Lead for School Improvement updated Members on the work in respect of this area.

The Committee was advised that Officers had met with a range of stakeholders and the outcome of those discussions were overwhelmingly positive with conversations centring around training, safeguarding and skills. Members were assured that feedback had been taken on board and it was hoped that engagement with stakeholders would continue into the near future.

Clarification on the recruitment of supply teachers was sought, with a Member querying whether the authority intended to hire temporary staff as previously the recruitment had taken place through agencies which did not offer a pension scheme or the teacher salary in full. Members were advised that the recruitment of supply teachers had been debated in full and extensively during the pandemic due to the substantial demand for cover work. Members were assured that Welsh Government was carrying out work in respect of this area and the Committee would be updated on the progress in the coming months.

The Chair requested an update from school leads and the Chief Education Officer was called on to facilitate the arrangements. The Chair's request was noted, and it was agreed that the Committee would benefit from a face-to-face discussion with head teachers.

Following consideration of the item, the Education Scrutiny Committee reviewed the attached document (Appendix 1) and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within it.

9. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT REPORT 2022-2027

Consideration was given to the report which presented a summary of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2027 to enable the governance process. The report also sought approval to submit the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2027 to Cabinet prior to its submission to Welsh Government.

The Education and Scrutiny Committee noted that the Childcare Act 2000 (Local Authority Assessment) (Wales) Regulations requires local authorities to prepare assessments of the sufficiency of childcare provision in their area and to keep these under review. It was noted that data had been collected over the Summer and Autumn in 2021 and analysed to write the assessment. The assessment report was subject to a 28-day public consultation and is required to be submitted to Welsh Government by September 22.

Reference was made to section 2.7 of the report, with a Member seeking further clarification on the commitment to extend childcare provision to 3 and 4 year-olds in part-time nursery to students in further education and higher education from September 2022, specifically the reasoning behind the delayed extension. It was advised that existing childcare offer was centred around working families, thus, both parents working and earning the equivalent of 16 hours at minimum wage per week which meant that students did not meet the eligibility criteria.

However, this was due to change with the recent commitment from Welsh Government to extend the provision. It was hoped that the provision would also extend to students undertaking vocational qualifications following the successful completion of a pilot scheme.

With the expansion of the Flying Start programme taking place from September 2022, a Member sought further information on what Phase 1 of the development scheme would entail. The Committee was advised that the expansion was due to roll out in stages as a result of the requirement to build up sufficient childcare places. Members were informed that Welsh Government were due to release information pertaining to Phase 2 of the programme in the Autumn period and it was hoped that all four elements of the scheme would expand and roll out to the New Tredegar area in September 2022.

Clarification on the eligibility criteria was sought. The Officer explained that the Flying Start programme was based on postcodes which were ranked using data from the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). Essentially, the scheme was based on areas of deprivation and Members were advised that the areas were ranked according to concentration of 0-3-year-olds residing in income benefit households. For those residing in non-Flying Start areas, it was confirmed that speech, language, child development and parent support was available through the Families First and Flying Start funding scheme.

A query was raised in relation to the prioritisation of Lower Layer Super Output areas (LSOA) of deprivation. It was reiterated that regions were prioritized using data from the DWP and that the additional three LSOA's would be given the greatest priority. Although a number of additional postcodes, which had previously missed out, had now been included in the St James' ward. In terms of numbers, it was advised that an additional 171 children aged 0-3 would be included in the Flying Start programme from September 2022.

Clarification on Pontllynn was sought, with a Member querying its status in terms of LSOA's. The Committee was advised that the region ranked low in terms of the number of income benefit households. However, for many years it had been surrounded by districts which met the eligibility criteria for the Flying Start Scheme.

Members were updated on the work which was underway in respect of Idris Davies. It was hoped that a new provider would be secured, which would enable the authority to expand provision within the region over an extended period of time.

The Officer was asked to confirm whether there were any plans in place to gather the views of shift working parents in respect of the provision. The Committee was advised that Welsh Government had undertaken a nationwide parent survey which fed into the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, the survey gathered the views of parents in respect of shift work and flexible childcare arrangements transpired as a common theme. It was acknowledged that flexibility in terms of opening hours would result in challenges for the scheme due to the limitations surrounding opening hours. However, Members were assured that the authority was working on an appropriate balance, and it was hoped that the balance would meet the needs of all service users.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms voting and verbal confirmation this was agreed by the majority.

RESOLVED that the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Report 2022-2027 be considered and submitted to Cabinet for approval.

The meeting closed at 7.36 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2022.

CHAIR