



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 19TH OCTOBER 2022 AT 5.30 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry - Chair

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Member:

Councillor C. Andrews (Education and Communities).

Together with:

Officers: 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), J. Southcombe (Finance Manager), J. Fabes (6th Form Review Lead), C. Forbes Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer), J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also present:

Co-opted Members: Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative) and Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative).

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J. Rao.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

3. EDUCATION STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities introduced the report to consult with Members of the Education Scrutiny Committee on the revised Education Strategy 2022-2025. Members were informed that the Council supports Welsh Government's plans for "Renew and Reform", acknowledging the disruption to learning experienced by all learners during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was acknowledged that certain groups, in particular the more vulnerable and disadvantaged, children in Early Years education, pupils learning the Welsh language, and young people in post-16 provision have been more affected by the pandemic. It was noted that other key factors to consider include the implementation of Curriculum for Wales alongside ALN reform. The Strategy, therefore, is focused on addressing these priorities. Members were further informed that the new Education Strategy will build on the successes of Shared Ambitions which shifted decision-making from short-term to long-term and school improvement approaches from 'challenge' to 'support'.

The Committee was advised that Education Strategy 2022-2025, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, has been developed in consultation with local authority staff (education and cross-directorate), schools, parents and carers, pupils, Unions, Governors, Further Education Colleges, Careers Wales, Social Services and the Education Achievement Service. It was noted that the key issues identified by each of the consultee groups are represented in the Strategy. Members were asked to provide their views as part of the consultation process.

The Chief Education Officer and the Strategic Lead for School Improvement provided the Committee with a brief overview of the Strategy.

A Member referred to the role of stakeholders in creating the Strategy, particularly in relation to the views of young people. It was noted that the key issues raised regarding the curriculum included learning more about the wider world, financial management including pensions, tax and mortgages, but did not consider civic duties. The Strategic Lead for School Improvement acknowledged the comments raised and advised Members that a series of events are planned with schools where the views of the Scrutiny Committee and other consultee groups will be presented.

A query was raised in relation to safeguarding, as to how disclosures are managed. The Chief Education Officer outlined the principles of safeguarding and asked the Member to submit their question in more detail, following to the meeting, in order to provide a more detailed response.

Clarification and further details were sought regarding performance indicators, baseline data and level of improvements. The Strategic Lead for School Improvement informed the Scrutiny Committee that performance indicators are used as part of the local authority's ongoing self-evaluation and improvement planning cycle and will hold services to account and identify priorities. It was explained that a mix of qualitative and quantitative data has been taken to assess the improvements made in preparation for the next Directorate Performance Assessment and an example was provided in relation to pupil attendance. The Chief

Education Officer reminded Members of the directive from Welsh Government in that the data is not to be used for accountability purposes. Members welcomed the suggestion for a Members Seminar on education data and accountability and also requested an update on exam results.

A Member drew particular attention to the report which outlined the Shared Ambitions Strategy and highlighted one of the areas for further development, in that to become more effective leaders should track and map the provision for vulnerable learners, reviewing how the information and data is utilised to carry out these key responsibilities. In response to a query, the Chief Education Officer explained how this area would be further developed and how schools would be supported to deliver it successfully. The Chief Education Officer also asked if Members do become aware of an individual situation where a child needs support, through conversations with parents or residents, to please encourage them to seek support and reassurance from the school or the Education Department.

In response to a Member's query, the Scrutiny Committee was informed that many schools have provision for mindfulness programmes or equivalent because they see it as a really important way of relieving anxiety and staff also have mindfulness opportunities through their professional learning.

The Strategic Lead for School Improvement responded to queries regarding the strategies to support and improve pupil attendance across the local authority, with particular focus on vulnerable groups. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that focus will be given to disadvantaged, vulnerable learners and pupils who are absent for long periods of time, which will be informed through regular data collections. The Local Authority will support schools in re-establishing policies and procedures in managing attendance, as well as carrying out focused casework with individual families and pupils.

Reference was made to the pedagogical method of teaching and an enquiry was made in relation to the provision of an andragogical approach for adults and young people aged 14 upwards. The Strategic Lead for School Improvement highlighted the innovate teaching and pedagogical methods taking place in schools and emphasised the need to expand and share this good practice.

A Member referred the Committee and Officers to the Learning throughout Life section of the Strategy, and it was noted that Caerphilly County Borough Council supports this continuation of the learning journey throughout its residents' lives. In response to a query from the Member, clarification and further information were provided in relation to the opportunities for adult learning and the current and potential funding for the various projects.

A discussion took place regarding the local context, particularly in relation to non-maintained education providers in the county borough, which have been identified as best practice but not reflected in the Strategy. The Chief Education Officer acknowledged the importance of the point raised and assured the Member that it would be taken forward.

The Chief Education Officer responded to a number of queries regarding pupil assessments and the Scrutiny Committee was informed that the types of assessments undertaken are rapidly changing. Members welcomed the suggestion for a report to be scheduled for a future meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee to explain the changes, particularly in the context of children and waiting for support. The report would also provide an opportunity to meet the team of Psychologists who would talk Members through some of the case studies and explain how things are now undertaken differently. The Chief Education Officer also explained how the number of pupils requiring additional support, in terms of anxiety and mental health, have grown exponentially, not just in Caerphilly but across the Country, but it is more prevalent in deprived communities.

A discussion took place regarding Welsh medium provision and the expectation for Youth Workers who are dealing with Welsh medium pupils to be able to speak Welsh and also be a

qualified Youth Worker. The Lead for School Improvement advised the Committee that the Youth Service has been proactive in terms of having Welsh medium Youth Clubs and are looking in terms of how they can be expanded.

In response to a Member's query the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services informed the Committee that the early take up on free school meals has not been as high as expected, particularly as we are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. Members were advised that a person has just been appointed to specifically start promoting and profiling the opportunities that exist and also find ways to address some of the challenges highlighted. In light of this the number of free school meals is expected to increase quite significantly over the next few months.

Following a request, the Early Years Manager provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Flying Start expansions and in response to a Member's query an outline was provided in relation to the number of stages and the timescale for implementation. Following a further request an update was also provided on Early Years provision.

The Chair expressed thanks to the Senior Youth Service Manager and the Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator for organising the successful Which Way Now event, which attracted over 650 young people who are seeking employment, education or training opportunities. A suggestion was made for the Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator to attend a future Education Scrutiny Committee meeting to deliver a presentation on the Which Way Now Events.

It was noted that the Education Strategy explores the roles and responsibilities of schools, and the key partnerships. In response to a Member's query, the Chief Education Officer outlined the role of the Education Achievement Service (EAS), emphasising the importance of working together to understand and support the needs of all children and young people and the commitment to those who are most vulnerable. A question was raised regarding the monitoring of children who are educated out of mainstream school. The Chief Education Officer informed the Committee that the number of elective home-educated pupils has risen across Wales. Members were advised that systems have been established for looking after vulnerable learners and an Elective Home Education Advisory Teacher has been appointed, who's role is to go out and check on the families and the education of families. Members were further advised that Officers are working with all the families on very bespoke plans and that they are also offered a way back into education.

Following on from a previous discussion a Member indicated that she had a list of issues in relation to the role of stakeholders in creating the Strategy and would submit those issues to the Strategic Lead for School Improvement, via e-mail, following the meeting.

In response to a Members query regarding supporting pupil wellbeing by improving attitudes to healthy food choices and active fitness, Members were informed of the Healthy Schools Team and provided with an overview of how the key issues will be addressed.

Members of the Education Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and provided their views as part of the consultation process.

The meeting closed at 7.03 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 14th February 2023 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR