



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry – Chair
Councillor B. Miles - Vice Chair

Councillors:

E.M. Aldworth, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, P. Cook, D. Cushing, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Gordon, T. Heron, J. Roberts, J. Simmonds, S. Skivens, J. Winslade, and K. Woodland.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor C. Andrews (Education and Communities), E. Forehead. (Social Care), and J. Pritchard (Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change).

Together with:

Officers: D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), A. West (Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager), G. Jenkins (Interim Director of Social Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director – Adult Services), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Co-opted Member: Mrs P. Ireland (NEU).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Bishop and A. Leonard, and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative), Mr G. James (Parent Governor Representative), Mrs K. Cole (NEU), and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that Councillor D. Cushing declared a personal interest on Agenda Item No. 9, Annual Report of the Director of Social Services and Housing for 2022/23 in that a close family member receives social care. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for her to leave the meeting and she could take full part in the debate.

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH OCTOBER 2023.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 17th October 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 9) be approved as a correct record.

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 AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period November 2023 to March 2024.

Members were advised a request had been received from WAVE Trust regarding their 70/30 campaign which seeks to reduce Child Abuse, Neglect and Adverse Childhood Experiences, and they would like the Scrutiny Committee to consider implementation of the aims and objectives of WAVE Trust, where possible.

A Member clarified that the Amalgamation Report due for the next meeting in January 2024 was not in relation to the Aber Valley ward. Members were advised that the report referred to by the member was still in discussions and would be listed at a future meeting of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee. Following further discussions on this matter, the Member was advised to contact the Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager direct, following the meeting.

Members requested the font size of appendix 1 be enlarged for future agenda packs, and it was also noted that some of the Cabinet Members' names should be corrected before the FWP is published.

Members discussed the WAVE Trust and proposed to defer the request from the WAVE Trust to a future meeting until further information is available, and it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of a roll call this was unanimously agreed.

A Member also requested an additional item be added to the FWP in relation to a briefing from EAS. Members were advised that a Members Seminar may be more beneficial for all Members to be included.

Following consideration of the report, and subject to the proposed additional items, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers, subject to the proposed additional agenda items, be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING BAND B PROGRAMME- CONSULTATION REPORT: YSGOL Y LAWNT AND UPPER RHYMNEY PRIMARY SCHOOL PROPOSAL.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities introduced the report which updated Members in relation to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Programme which proposed to create a sustainable school building with shared facilities, to accommodate Ysgol Y Lawnt, Upper Rhymney Primary School and Community use. Members were informed that the two schools will continue to provide both Welsh and English Medium Primary Education and remain as separate entities, situated within the new dual-purpose building.

Members were also advised that the proposal went to formal consultation between the 28th September 2023 and the 9th November 2023, and that to discharge the Council's duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, there is now a requirement for Cabinet Members to give due regard to the Consultation Report and determine whether or not it is appropriate to move to the next stage of the process.

A Member queried the value of the buildings when closed, and whether this would go towards the new school building. Members were advised that the schools had not yet been valued, and will be declared surplus to educational requirements. The future of the buildings will be determined following that declaration.

During the ensuing discussion Members received information on consultation response rates and a minor error was highlighted in the categories of respondents as percentages table in the appendices. Officers provided assurances that the final report would be amended.

A Member queried whether the low level of responses was typical and noted only one response was made through the medium of Welsh. Members were advised that this could be viewed as positive, given that people who usually respond are against the proposals. Members were assured that a full consultation had taken place.

A Member requested whether a breakdown of parents' responses indicating which school their child attended, could be made available. Members were advised that this information was available and would be circulated following the meeting.

A Member sought clarification on the relevant costings of the proposal, and whether there had been any changes, and if a contingency had been built in. Members were advised that until this had undergone market testing, the figures were based on information provided by Welsh Government.

The Chair requested that a visit be arranged to the new Cwm Gwyddon school, and Members were advised that this could be arranged in the New Year and availability for dates would be checked.

Following consideration of the consultation report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation, (and in noting, there were 14 For, 0 Against, and 1 Abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee:

1. Endorse the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal for Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School.

8. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 – CONSULTATION REPORT: PROPOSAL FOR THE CLOSURE OF CWM GLAS INFANT SCHOOL.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities introduced the report which updated Members in relation to the proposal to close Cwm Glas Infants School by July 2024.

Members were informed that due to the falling rolls at the school which are projected to decrease further in future years, a meeting was arranged by the Head Teacher and the Governing Body with Local Authority representatives including the Chief Education Officer, to discuss the future viability of the school. The conclusion of this meeting agreed the school could no longer maintain a balanced budget and an appropriate staffing level; therefore, the Head Teacher and Governing Body of the School decided to pursue closure of Cwm Glas Infants School with effect from July 2024.

Members were advised that the proposal went to formal consultation between the 28th September 2023 and the 9th November 2023, and to discharge the Council's duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, there is now a requirement for Cabinet Members to give due regard to the content of the Consultation Report and determine whether or not it is appropriate to move to the next stage in the process.

A Member sought clarification on the responses received and noted that a high percentage of those responses were against the proposals, however the report stated that evidence shows there is a positive level of support. Members were advised that where a proposal includes the closure of a school there would normally be a higher level of responses opposing the closure.

During the ensuing discussion Members received information on consultation response rates, the level of support for the proposal, and a minor error was highlighted in the categories of respondents as percentages table in the appendices. Officers provided assurances that the final report would be amended.

A Member queried the number of pupils currently at the school and Members were advised that there are 33 pupils at the school, which is due to reduce to 24 in September 2024.

The Co-opted Member representing NEU wished to note their thanks for the assistance being provided to the staff currently working at the school.

A Member noted that the proposal to close the school would mean that those children affected could attend another school less than a mile away.

Following consideration of the consultation report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 15 For, 0 Against, and 1 Abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee:

1. Endorse the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Cwm Glas Infant School by July 2024.

9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING FOR 2022/23.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care introduced the report which informed Members of the key messages that have been identified in the preparation of the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services and Housing for 2022/23. Members were asked to note the contents of the Director's Report prior to its submission to Council on the 29th of November 2023 for its publication.

The former Director of Social Services and Housing also gave an introduction into the details included in the report and wished to note his thanks to all staff working in social care.

A Member also noted thanks to social care staff, and queried whether NHS carers were paid more than those employed by the local authority. Members were advised that it was difficult to compare the different roles but that NHS employees were in general, paid more.

A Member sought clarification on the number of people waiting for care and care packages, and how these are prioritised to determine who receives the care. Members were advised that these figures had improved since the 2022/23 annual report was produced.

The Chair clarified that Dewis is embedded and available on the internet. Members were advised that there is a dedicated Dewis Officer working within the IAA team.

The Chair wished to note the compliments and thanks to all staff in social care. Another Member wished to commend the work of social workers.

The Chair sought clarification on the 50% of care leavers entering into higher education or training and queried the other 50%. Members were advised that contact is kept with all care leavers and the statutory responsibility of the local authority ends at 21, but this can go up to 25 years of age if they are in education or training.

A Member suggested that some Members could meet with foster carers if possible. Members were advised that there is a regular support group for foster carers that Members could be invited to in the future.

A Member thanked Officers for the report and sought clarification on the timescales for house adaptations that allowed residents to return home from hospitals. Members were advised that these minor and major adaptations are undertaken by Housing and the information required could be obtained for Members following the meeting.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 30th of January 2024.

CHAIR