



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 30TH JANUARY 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Members:

Councillors C. Andrews (Education and Communities), and E. Forehead (Social Care).

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), G. Jenkins (Interim Director of Social Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director – Adult Services), T. McMahon (Caerphilly Cares Manager), A. Griffiths (Service Delivery Manager), D. Boucher (Service Support Manager), S.J Irish (Cost of Living Co-Ordinator), C. Quinn (Healthy Schools Practitioner), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

E. Pryce (Assistant Director: Policy and Strategy, Education Achievement Service), S. Speedy (School Improvement Partner, Education Achievement Service), S. Ellington (Citizens Advice Bureau), C. Morgan (Citizens Advice Bureau), R. Owen (Headteacher – Idris Davies School), and J. Duggan (Assistant Head – Idris Davies School).

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 Councillor D. Cushing, and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative), Mr G. James (Parent Governor Representative), Mrs P. Ireland

(NEU), Mrs K. Cole (NEU), and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that Councillor M. Chacon-Dawson declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 7. Update on the Progress and Evaluation of Caerphilly Cares and Employee Volunteering Scheme in that she is married to someone who works for GAVO.

It was noted that Councillor S. Skivens declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 7. Update on the Progress and Evaluation of Caerphilly Cares and Employee Volunteering Scheme in that he is a Trustee of Citizens Advice Bureau, Blaenau Gwent.

As these were personal interests only there was no requirement for them to leave the meeting and they could take a full part in the debate

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 28TH NOVEMBER 2023.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 13 for, 0 against, and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 28th November 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 Manager introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period January 2024 to March 2024.

An update report on the changes to the Inspection framework was agreed for the Special meeting in May or later in the year.

Councillor E. Forehead noted that her name was incorrectly listed on items in the FWP and that these should be replaced with Councillor C. Andrews.

Following consideration of the report, and with the inclusion of the additional report, 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, as amended, 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. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS AND EVALUATION OF CAERPHILLY CARES AND EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING SCHEME.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which provided Members with an update on progress, key successes, and challenges of the Caerphilly Cares Service and Employee Volunteering Scheme.

Representatives from Citizens Advice Bureau advised Members of their successful working relationship with Caerphilly Cares and the benefits that they had gained. CAB had also supported Caerphilly Cares, attending the 'cost of living' events, and had received funding to operate a fuel voucher scheme which Caerphilly Cares could provide referrals to. CAB also assisted residents in their applications for the 'cost of living' hardship fund. Members were advised that two full time posts in CAB were being funded by CCBC for the next two years, a Welfare Benefits Specialist, and a Debt Specialist.

A Member sought clarification on the purpose of Caerphilly Cares. Members were advised that residents approach the Council for help, advice and support and that CCBC are able to direct the resident to the appropriate department or third sector. Members were also advised that the role of Caerphilly Cares included supporting residents via the third sector, which would hopefully prevent them from needing the services of the Councils' Social Services department.

The Member also queried whether the introduction of a new database in Caerphilly Cares had been successful and whether it had improved the role of Caerphilly Cares. Members were advised that the new database had improved the 'information sharing' with other departments of the Council, and further specific information on the database would be sought and provided to Members if required.

The Member also sought clarification on how external volunteers are rewarded, compared to the volunteers employed by CCBC who received incentives of extra annual leave. Members were advised that external volunteers would not be rewarded in the same way as they were not employed by CCBC and would not be covered by that specific policy.

A Member referred to the testimonials in the report and queried how people could be made more aware of the help available. Members were advised that Caerphilly Cares is publicised and promoted widely, in addition to 'word of mouth' from residents in the Community.

A Member noted the work and comprehensive report by Officers and requested further financial information regarding the costs of projects, a breakdown of funding received and details of spending. Members were advised that a financial summary would be forwarded to Members following the meeting.

A Member sought clarification on the 'befriending' service provided by Caerphilly Cares, which was thought to be the responsibility of GAVO. Members were advised that the 'befriending' service had been long established within Social Services. The Member also noted that they had been unable to contact Caerphilly Cares on numerous occasions. The Member was invited to give specific details to the Caerphilly Cares Manager and this matter would be dealt with following the meeting.

A Member noted that Charity organisations are being over-subscribed where CCBC are making referrals to them without any funding. Reference was made to the Day Centres and the need to support the Charity organisations that were being referred to. Members were advised that there was a high demand for the services available and that the demand was currently higher than what was available to residents. Members were informed of the need for more volunteers to meet demand for particular services. The Member queried whether CCBC could assist with training or funding for these Charities. Members were advised that this issue would be considered following the meeting.

A Member sought clarification on information sharing within departments. Members were advised that a 'single point of contact' process is managed where data is collated to assist residents with various departments they may need to contact in the Council, and this information is shared with other relevant departments, so that unnecessary duplication is avoided, and residents' records are updated to include any historical issues. Members were also advised that this information would be held for 6 years.

A Member queried the success of the 'Buddy Scheme' within Social Services. Members were advised that this scheme was set up during the pandemic and was run by CCBC and involved CCBC employees. Following the pandemic the 'Befriending Service' was reformed and original volunteers of this service were keen to become involved again, as this service had been 'put on hold' during the pandemic. Members were informed that whilst there was a turnover of volunteers due to changes in their circumstances, many volunteers would remain in the service for a long time.

A Member sought clarification on the Shared Prosperity Fund, and whether it was means tested and/or repayable by householders. Members were advised that the grants are means tested but not repayable, and further information regarding the means testing would be forwarded to Members following the meeting. The Member also queried whether a text service was available for the deaf community to access this service and whether the Caerphilly Cares team attend clubs within the community with a BSL interpreter. Members were advised that this is not currently happening but could be considered to improve the service for deaf residents.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report.

8. KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES IN 2023.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which provided Members with final outcome data for Secondary schools within the Local Authority for 2022-2023 (Summer 2023). Members were informed that this year, for the first time since 2019, the Welsh Government are producing Key Stage 4 (KS4) All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS) at individual school level. Each of the last four years used different methods for determining grades, so none are directly comparable. In 2023 national outcomes are lower than 2022, 2021 and 2020, but not as low as 2019.

The EAS Assistant Director – Policy and Strategy, gave a presentation to Members which was an Explanatory Introduction for Members on Key Stage 4 Performance Measures. Members were also provided with a detailed explanation of all the charts and graphs within the report.

A Member queried whether any consideration was given to gender reassignment when grading, as reference was made to males and females. Members were advised that the data was provided by Welsh Government and no other categorisation was provided.

A Member sought clarification on the 'families' and 'positions' of the schools. Members were given an explanation on the positions 1 to 10, with position 1 being the most socio-economically disadvantaged school. Members were also advised on how the schools are 'grouped' together.

A Member queried whether pupils attending the most socio-economically disadvantaged schools were still at a disadvantage even though they may have experienced teachers. Members were advised that data had shown for numerous years that the schools with a higher level of pupils receiving free school meals, had a lower level of performance.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and presentation and requested the presentation slides be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the contents of the report, asked questions, and offered views about overall school outcomes.

9. HEALTHY SCHOOLS ON VAPING.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which considered national and local concerns around vaping amongst young people and identified how the Local Authority continues to support schools to address these concerns.

Members were advised that in 2021/22, just under 125,000 11- to 16-year-olds across Wales took part in the School Health Research Network Survey and data indicated that 1 in 5 young people in Gwent are reported to have tried an electronic cigarette, more commonly known as vaping. Members were informed that in a commitment to reduce the increasing number of young people vaping across Caerphilly, the healthy schools team work in partnership with Public Health Wales and other external providers. Schools receive comprehensive and age-appropriate guidance to educate pupils of the adverse effects of vaping. This will, in turn, encourage informed choices around the use of vapes.

The Headteacher from Idris Davies School gave a presentation to Members on vaping in schools, in particular, data provided related to Idris Davies School. Members were given information on the background of e-cigarettes, the increased use of them by their school pupils, and the impact of the disruption, anti-social behaviour in toilets and damage to school property caused by pupils vaping during lesson time.

Members were informed of the response to these issues by Idris Davies School, which included increased monitoring of areas around the school, trialling of vape alarms in toilets, educating pupils of the risks involved and adapting school's behaviour policy to prevent pupils vaping in future.

A Member referred to a BBC Panorama documentary from September 2023, which also highlighted the issues of vaping in schools, and questioned the current involvement CCBC Trading Standards may have with regards to the sale of vapes. Members were advised that the relevant Officers would be contacted following the meeting and further information would be circulated to Members.

A Member queried what involvement the school had with the parents of children who had been vaping in school. Members were advised that when a pupil is identified, vaping in school, the device is confiscated, and contact is made with the parents who are invited to the school to discuss the issue. The schools' aim is to support the pupil and educate them to prevent further vaping in the future.

A Member wished to note thanks to the Headteacher for the excellent presentation and information provided.

A Member queried whether the pupils, when educated about the risks and effects of vaping, were surprised by what they learn. Members were advised that this was a difficult area, as vaping is widely perceived to be an acceptable alternative to smoking but can still cause unknown damage that pupils are unaware of.

A Member noted the interesting presentation and queried whether the vapes were purchased locally or online. Members were advised that, from speaking to the pupils, the vapes are thought to have been purchased off pupils who may have bought in bulk online, and then sold to other pupils. Members were also advised that it was understood they are also purchased in the local community, and it was suggested that pupils could be asked to confirm the exact premises from which they were purchased. The Member sought clarification on any interventions by Trading Standards and other relevant departments of the Council. Members were informed that this could be a subject covered by a separate Members Seminar in the near future.

A Member queried whether there were any social media campaigns regarding vaping, which were directed at school children, and suggested that the local authority could produce an awareness campaign/competition targeted at school children.

Members were advised that information is passed on to the Police, where premises selling vapes to school children are identified.

A Member queried how reported incidents of vaping on school bus journeys is dealt with. Members were advised that these incidents are treated the same as if they had occurred on school premises, if the pupils can be identified, which can be difficult as school staff are not present on the buses.

A Member clarified that information is given verbally to parents when they are contacted by the school, however an information/health leaflet would be considered if this were available to schools.

Members were advised that teachers had reported that pupils who were becoming addicted to vaping, were disrupting lessons to access the toilets to vape, and that this was also affecting their education.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the contents of the report, and endorsed the support offered to schools.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th March 2024.

CHAIR