



## **EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 13TH JANUARY 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.**

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**PRESENT:**

Councillor W. David - Chair  
Councillor J. Pritchard - Vice-Chair

**Councillors:**

P.J. Bevan, H.R. Davies, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D. Havard, M.P. James, G. Johnston, and D.W.R. Preece

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: Mrs R. Passmore

**Together with:**

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion), G. Evans (Senior Manager- Planning & Strategy - Library Services), J. Garland (Service Manager - Social Inclusion), Bleddyn Hopkins (Assistant Director for Education), Tony Maher (Assistant Director Planning & Strategy), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Co-opted Members: Mr A. Farina-Childs (Parent Governor), Mrs A. Goss (Parent Governor) Mrs P. Ireland (NUT) and Mr M. Weston (Cardiff ROC)

Also Present: Dylan Thomas (Education Rep, Youth Forum) and Lauren Prosser (Vice Chair, Youth Forum).

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillors Mrs A. Blackman, D.M. Gray, Mrs G.D. Oliver, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, Mrs M.E. Sargent and Mrs J. Havard (NUT).

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **3. MINUTES – 4TH NOVEMBER 2014**

RESOLVED that, subject to it being noted that there had been no reference to the Local Development Plan, as detailed in the penultimate paragraph of Minute No. 9, the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4th November 2014 (minute no. 1 – 13) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THIS 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. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

Councillor Mrs R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, provided the Committee with success stories for Adult Community Learning. The current figures for the Bridges into work and Working Skills for ESF projects, which are due to finish in March, were very pleasing with all but 1 of the targets being met or exceeded with 3 months still remaining. It is anticipated that the final target of further learning for Working Skills for Adults participants will be met as soon as all the data is processed.

The Committee noted that The Prince of Wales formally opened Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute on 12th December 2014. The recently opened Library and Cash Office has seen an increase of 23% in visits since its first calendar year of operation and issued 50,000 books and other items to local residents.

Councillor R. Passmore congratulated Heledd Gwynant, a Year 11 Student at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni on a successful audition to join the Percussion Section of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note the Cabinet Members update and extended their best wishes to the student at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni.

**6. CABINET REPORTS**

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

**REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following reports.

**7. PRESENTATION BY THE YOUTH FORUM**

Dylan Thomas (Education Rep, Youth Forum) and Lauren Prosser (Vice Chair, Youth Forum) presented the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee with the Youth Forum Priorities through a Digital Story by the Junior Forum, and a Presentation by the Youth Forum. The presentations outlined the issues affecting Young People, such as Littering, Bullying Awareness, Dog Fouling, Mental Health Awareness and offering more meaningful work experiences. In addition, the Youth Forum Priorities also included a proposal to progress an awareness campaign for young people around Domestic Abuse, create Educational Resources, a Poster Campaign and a White Band Campaign, alongside the White Ribbon Campaign.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning and Members of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee thanked the Youth Forum representatives for their excellent presentation and the valid and important priorities identified. It was noted that the Cabinet expressed a keen interest in the White Band Campaign and would look to support it where possible.

Members discussed Mental Health Awareness and concerns were raised that there were no services in place for young people between the ages of 16 to 18. Officers highlighted that services such as counseling are available within schools, and work closely with CAHMS, NHS specialists in child and adolescent mental health.

Members highlighted issues with littering within their area and sought further information from the young people on their plans to tackle the issue. The Core Group of the Junior Forum intended to work together to develop a poster campaign, which would be distributed within schools to raise awareness. In addition, Members suggested school visits and approaching local companies to sponsor the campaign and additional litterbins.

The Caerphilly Youth Champion, Councillor Prew thanked the Scrutiny Committee for the opportunity to present the Youth and Junior Forum issues and Cabinet for supporting the Domestic Abuse and White Bands Campaign. Members discussed Domestic Abuse and queried the level of education and understanding and the support in schools for victims of Domestic Abuse. It was determined that the level of explanation of Domestic Abuse varied between different schools and PSE lessons. The Acting Deputy Chief Executive added that Although there is no specific support in schools, there is a strong team of staff within schools, who could make referrals to respective organisations to provide support.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Youth Forum and Junior Forum for their presentation.

## **8. IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

J. Garland, Service Manager, Social Inclusion, presented Members with a report and presentation, which highlighted the progress made in improving attendance in schools within the borough.

The Committee noted that during the academic year 2013/14 there was an increase in both primary and secondary school attendance in comparison with 2012/13. There remains evidence of a strong correlation between poor attendance and those children and young people eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), which has also been indicated in the National Statistics First Release Absenteeism from Secondary Schools in Wales 2013/14. Members noted that improving attendance remains a priority for the Local Authority (LA) and is a target in the Learning Education and Inclusion Service Improvement Plan.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and highlighted that secondary school attendance appeared to be falling behind the Welsh Average every year, and queried the target for 2015/16. Officers highlighted that the target for 2015/16 would be set in the coming weeks. Members noted that all authorities have seen an improvement in attendance as a result of collaboration and information sharing and were asked to consider factors that have an impact on attendance within Caerphilly, such as pupil holidays and the targeted intervention work that has been undertaken within schools.

A Member queried whether Trinity Fields was included in the Authority's attendance data. It was explained that only mainstream schools were included in the Welsh Government data, however, this also included Resource Bases. Members noted that separating the Resource Based and Mainstream data would be difficult and the impact on the attendance data would be minimal.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and was pleased to note the progress being made in improving attendance in schools within the borough.

## **9. REDUCING EXCLUSIONS**

J. Garland, Service Manager, Social Inclusion, presented Members with a report and presentation, which provided an overview of the progress made in relation to exclusions from schools within the Borough.

The Local Authority (LA) works with schools and other partners to ensure a robust approach towards the reduction of exclusions. During 2011/12, the need to reduce exclusions became an urgent priority and has continued to be a focus in all key plans.

The Committee noted that there were no permanent exclusions issued in primary schools for three consecutive years. There has, however, been a significant increase in the number of permanent exclusions issued in secondary schools. There were no fixed term exclusions issued in over 50% of primary schools. There was a decrease in the overall number of fixed term exclusions as well as the number of days lost due to all exclusions in both primary and secondary schools. However, the number of days lost due to fixed term exclusions of 6 days or more in primary schools has increased significantly. The aforementioned increases in exclusions have caused concern and are a priority for the LA.

During 2013/14, there were disproportionately more exclusions issued to boys compared with girls. This was more pronounced in primary schools. There were more exclusions issued to children who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared with those who were not eligible for FSMs in primary schools. This is a different picture in secondary schools with disproportionately more exclusions issued to children who are not eligible for FSM. There were less exclusions issued to children in vulnerable groups including children who are Looked After and those with Statements of Special Educational Needs compared with those who were not in these groups.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussed the statistics and trends. It was highlighted that there is a notable difference in the exclusions issued to boys compared with girls. Officers provided that there are number of variances between the gender groups and how they deal with and present emotions etc. Factors such as age and background can have an impact on behaviour; however, the implementation of the Behaviour Strategy would facilitate further reductions in exclusions.

A Member highlighted that there were no permanent exclusions issued in the last 3 years in primary schools; however there was an increase in fixed term exclusions (over 6 days) issued in primary schools and as a result, sought further information on any policy changes. The Officer provided that permanent exclusions in Primary Schools are highly irregular, however there are situations that could warrant a lengthy fixed term exclusion, which could result in the child being placed in alternative provision. In addition, Members noted that the schools were responsible for managing behaviour and have implemented a number of sanctions prior to the issuing of exclusion.

Members discussed the data and sought further information on the 14 exclusions made and their placements. It was highlighted that some children had moved outside of the Local Authority area. The Committee noted that all placements have been going well and evidence has suggested that a fresh start in an alternative school is often the action necessary to improve the behaviour and attainment of a pupil.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

**10. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH LIBRARY SERVICE MTFP 2015/17 – REVISED ‘TIERING OF DELIVERY’ OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

G. Evans, Senior Manager, Planning & Strategy - Library Services, presented the Committee with revised saving options for the Council's Public Library Service, following a request in June 2014, that further development and consideration of option 3 ('Present network of Public Libraries maintained but opening arrangements and contracted hours of staff employment are tapered to a more economical sustainable level linked to the Borough's present banding model of delivery') be brought back to Committee.

The Committee noted that Option 3 had been revised into two substantive proposals for consideration.

Option 3(a), which would contribute an estimated part year saving of £67k in 2015/16 and £134k saving in 2016/17, provided that all locations share a reduction in opening times from 570.5 to 496.5, and there would be no loss in the number of service points available to the public. Saturday provision would be retained at 4 largest town centre facilities, however this option would require a £70k investment in 7 self-service computer kiosks at smaller sites and a degree of single staffed provision to generate the savings required. Members noted that over 60 posts would be affected by some level of employment change, as roles would require variation to better match the new opening times. In addition, Members noted that Option 3(a) was the least disruptive tapering option that retained best match to present arrangements.

Option 3(b), which would contribute an estimated part year saving of £59.5k in 2015/16 and £119k in 2016/17, provided that all locations share a reduction in opening times from 570.5 to 496.5, however, there would be no loss in the number of service points available to the public and Saturday access would be retained at the present 9 locations currently provided. This option would require a £70k investment in 7 self-service computer kiosks at smaller sites and a degree of single staffed provision to generate the savings required. Members noted that over 60 posts would be affected by some level of employment change, such as some staff at smaller sites to work every weekend. In addition, Members noted that Option 3(b) was the more disruptive and poses a higher probability of unplanned library closures due to inability to provide suitable cover on Saturdays.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the performance information on each service point for weekday and weekend activity. Members noted that the generic 'mean' weekday performance, between April and November 2014 demonstrated that provision was marginally above an equivalent Saturday, however, use by families and children etc may be higher on a given Saturday, but could not be easily identified from the total activity levels reported.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the information and discussion and debate ensued.

A Member requested further information on the 4 main libraries that are planned to open and whether there would be any scope for other sites to open on a Saturday. The Officer highlighted that this could be considered following the implementation of one of the options. Members noted that staffing issues and customer services are a concern and priority and the options have been carefully considered with these in mind.

The Committee discussed the Saturday Opening and staff cover in Option 3(a). It was noted that a rota system would be implemented in order to distribute staff cover fairly and this principle would negate lone working at a site.

Members discussed opportunities to offer space within libraries to organisations, in order to increase income, as arranged in Abercarn. The Officer highlighted that this could be considered and explored provided the option was sustainable.

Members discussed Option 3(b) and raised concerns around impact on library users where their local sites would no longer open on a Saturday. Officers highlighted that the table within the presentation demonstrated the footfall within libraries during the week and weekend and presented that footfall within libraries are busier during the week. In addition, Members were assured that the 6pm closing time would be maintained at least 1 day per week in all libraries with the aim to accommodate the public as much as is possible within the restricted budget.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee supported Option 3a and their views be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

## **11. DRAFT SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2015-16**

T. Maher, Assistant Director Planning & Strategy provided the Committee with an overview of the report and appendices, which was considered by Cabinet on 29th October 2014.

The report provided details of the Provisional 2015/16 Local Government Settlement along with an updated Medium Term Financial Plan for the period 2015/16 to 2017/18. The report also presented details of proposed savings for 2015/16 totalling £12.208m and a proposal to increase Council Tax for 2015/16 by 3.9%.

The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider an additional saving requirement of £50,000, which was considered and approved by Cabinet. The saving was identified within the SEN Out of County/ LAC/ Inter Authority budget, which has demonstrated a significant underspend for a number of years.

Members raised concerns about the reduction of the budget the risk of increased demand in the future. Officers reassured the Committee that the risk of overspend on the budget is low, however, additional funds could be called upon from within departmental budgets, Corporate Budgets or Council reserves if required.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the saving proposal in the report be endorsed and forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

## **12. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE PLACED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA**

The following requests for reports were received.

- (1) Councillor Denver Preece requested a report on the reduction in Free School Meals (FSM) take-up. It was agreed that the Acting Deputy Chief Executive would circulate a report to the Committee. Scrutiny Committee agreed that a further update would be brought to committee in six months to take into account the recent FSM promotion and reflect any impact
- (2) Councillor Colin Gordon requested an update on 21 Century schools development at Oakdale Plateau.
- (3) Councillor Derek Havard requested a report on Governor Training. It was noted that the report has been tabled for the next Education Scrutiny Committee.

## **13. INFORMATION ITEMS**

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. They were not brought forward for review.

1. New Governance Arrangements for South East Wales Education Achievement Service.
2. Discretionary Incidents in Schools Report 2014.
3. School Challenge Cymru Update.

The meeting closed at 8.05 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 24th February 2015, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR