



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 20TH MAY 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D. Havard, J. Roberts, R. Saralis and Mrs M. Sargent.

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: R. Passmore

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), G. Evans (Senior Manager- Planning & Strategy - Library Services, B. Hopkins (Assistant Director for Education), T. Maher (Assistant Director Planning & Strategy), S. Dixon (Disability Access Officer), A. Price (Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring 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 Mrs J. Havard (NUT).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.R. Davies, M.P. James, G. Johnston, Mrs G. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece and M. Weston (Cardiff ROC).

2. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair informed Members of the recent illness of Mr Martyn Weston (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative). The Committee expressed their concern for Mr Weston and wished him a swift and full recovery. The Committee agreed to send a letter to Mr Weston expressing their sentiments.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES – 24TH FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24th February 2015 (minute no. 1 – 13) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. 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.

6. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Councillor R. Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, provided the Committee with a written update. It was noted that the Achievement Awards Events for Looked After Children, held in January 2015, was a huge success. Positive feedback was received from children, carers, Members, Councillors and professionals, which is a testimony to the investment and commitment the Local Authority makes in celebrating the efforts of some of the most vulnerable learners.

The Cabinet Member provided an update on the developments of the ALN Review and noted that a Trinity Fields satellite class has been established for Cwm Ifor Primary School, which aims to improve inclusive opportunities and educational outcomes for identified pupils, as well as further developing Trinity Fields role as a forward looking centre of excellence, providing professional support and training to specialist resource bases across the borough.

It was noted that following the highly successful 'Real Opportunities Project', Caerphilly has been invited by the Welsh European Funding Office to develop a business case for funding, for the continuation of the project to support the transition into employment for young people with disabilities or Autism.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that in December, the Caerphilly Music Service showcased the talents of children and young people at an event in St David's Hall, Cardiff. The Music Service is now actively involved in supporting the forthcoming Urdd Eisteddfod.

It was noted that, following an inspection of Adult Community Learning for the Gwent 5 County Partnership, Caerphilly CBC have now been awarded Excellent Prospects for Improvement and Excellent in KQ3 Quality Improvement. All the other indicators were judged as good.

Finally, Councillor Passmore announced that Mr Tim Williams, the current Headteacher at Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School, has been appointed as the Headteacher of the new Islwyn West School.

7. 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.

8. COMMUNITY CENTRE SERVICE – UPDATE

The report provided Members with an update on the community centre provision and considered a way forward in the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Committee noted that there are currently 38 community centres, supported by the Local Authority, 35 of which are owned by Caerphilly County Borough Council and leased to the respective management committees.

In September 2014, a report was presented to the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee, outlining future service options for the Council's community centre service, taking due note of the Authority's MTFP. At that time, the Scrutiny Committee considered a number of options and agreed to support a combination of Options 3 (reduced network of community centres) and Option 4 (alternative delivery method), and requested the creation of a Task and Finish Group to undertake the review process that will identify activity levels and proximity to other facilities, which centres may be suitable for asset transfer and consideration of closures.

The Committee discussed the timeline for the Task and Finish Group and Officers highlighted that, in order for any changes to influence the 2016/17 budget, the recommendations of the Task and Finish be included in the process in October. It was agreed that further information on the Membership, political balance and declarations/conflict of interest would be supported by the Scrutiny Research Officer.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to review community centre provision. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report, a Task and Finish Group be established to review future provision of community centres, including criteria, terms of reference, and timeline as outlined therein.

9. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH EDUCATION TRANSPORT MTFP 2015/18 – ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

The report considered options from Caerphilly County Borough Education Transport Service following the previous report to Special Scrutiny Committee on 19th June 2014.

Members were asked to consider the County Borough Education Transport Service's review options in assisting the Local Authority to meet its obligations in respect of the 2015/2018 MTFP to achieve a 20% general reduction in overall spend.

ET1 – Post 16 Transport for Mainstream Students

The Committee noted that CCBC's post-16 transport policy currently offers free transport to students attending their nearest or catchment school or the nearest college to home, providing they reside more than 2 miles from the school or establishment. Whilst there is no statutory duty to make/provide transport arrangements for students over the age of 16 years, legislation does require that if transport is provided in line with the Council's prescribed criteria, the provision must be equitable, with no differential policy. At present, transport is provided to schools with 6th forms and students travel with Year 7 – 11 pupils and are accommodated under existing contracts. Dedicated contract buses or season tickets are provided to students

attending college.

The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider 5 options, having consideration for the impact on low-income families, however, any variances may impact upon the MTFP target reductions:-

- Option 1 – withdraw all post-16 transport for students - potential saving £850k per annum
- Option 2 – introduce a fixed grant for students – potential saving £360k to £660k per annum (based on grants of £250 and £140 per student per year respectively).
- Option 3 – Introduce a cap on transport costs by setting a maximum contribution from the Council – potential saving £77k per annum (based on a £350 annual travel grant)
- Option 4 – introduce a fixed parental contribution for all post-16 students – potential saving £418k per annum (based on £150 charge per student per year).
- Option 5 – cap the upper age limit for post 16 transport – would be applied to options (2) to (4).

Members thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. Members considered the Options and suggested that Option 4 was the more favourable and fair, however, they raised concerns around the additional cost to families. Officers explained that the law requires equal treatment of students and agreed that Option 4 was more favourable. In addition, Members noted that there is an Education Maintenance Allowance, which is available to students receiving Free School Meals and families on low income, which could assist with the additional transport costs.

Members discussed the administration and the additional costs associated with collecting costs from Parents. Officers explained that they would look at arrangements in other Local Authorities for best practice and feed back to the Committee at a later date.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support Option 4 (Introduce a fixed parental contribution for all post 16 – potential saving £418k per annum (based on £150 charge per student per year)), with the addition that officers have consideration for hardship and low income families and consider alternatives for this. By a show of hands (and in noting that there were 2 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

ET2 – Review of Walking Distances

The Council has a statutory duty to provide pupils aged 5 to 16 years old with free school transport to their nearest school if the walking distance between their home and nearest school is more than 2 miles (for primary education) or 3 miles (for secondary education). Caerphilly provides transport for pupils who attend their “relevant” school and defines walking distances as 1.5 miles for primary education and 2 miles for secondary pupils. “Relevant” school is defined as the catchment school or the nearest school. The report proposed that further work is required to assess the impact of this change in policy and therefore a target implementation date of September 2017 is proposed.

Members discussed the report and concerns were raised around the new Islwyn West School, in which free transport was offered to students in Pontllanfraith. Officers explained that the changes would be implemented in some schools from September 2016, however, consideration will be given to new 21st Century Schools, such as Islwyn West and Gwindy.

A Member raised concern about the increase in walking distance and the impact on education, in particular, that of Primary School Children. Officers advised that the guidance and distance has been defined by the Welsh Government (WG) and that current walking distances are discretionary and lower than WG guidance, which has a financial impact on the Local Authority. It was noted that there are currently 5 Local Authorities with discretionary walking distances in place, the other 17 have implemented Statutory levels, however, consideration is being made in each Authority to make levels Statutory.

Members discussed the calculation of walking distances, raising concerns for any hazardous walkways and shortcuts. Officers explained that the distance is measured from home to school, using safe routes, which are calculated by the GIS system or a measuring wheel.

Following detailed consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation to increase the Statutory Walking Distances to 2 miles for Primary School and 3 Miles for Secondary School, as statutory distance, with the exception of Islwyn West and Gwindy 21st Century Schools. By a show of hands (and in noting that there were 5 against) this was agreed by the majority present.

ET3 – Post 16 Transport for Pupils/Students with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the proposal and a Member sought further information on the financial support provided to parents of children with disabilities. Officers clarified that the Local Authority provides transport for children with disabilities to attend the relevant location, however, there are some students who will be taken by their parents.

Members considered and discussed the item and it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation to maintain the current service. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

ET4 – Charging for Free Concessionary Transport

Members considered the report and discussion ensued. It was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation to maintain the current service. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

ET5 – Provision of Escorts on Primary School Transport

Members considered the report and strongly agreed with the Officers recommendation. It was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation to maintain the current service. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

ET6 – Provision of Escorts on Secondary School Transport

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal, and it was noted that escorts on Secondary School Transport were originally implemented as a result of pupil behaviour. Discussions ensued and it was suggested that a review be conducted. Members agreed that provision remain in place until the Autumn to determine whether the service is required.

Following detailed consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the provision be monitored and later reviewed, to determine if still required. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

ET7 – Provision of Transport to Faith Schools

Members considered the provision and it was noted that there is one Faith Primary School within the County Borough and all Secondary provision is out of county and therefore transport is required for pupils attending Faith schools.

Having fully considered the proposal, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation to continue to maintain the current service. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

ET8 – Provision of Transport to Welsh Medium Schools

Members discussed the transport provision for Welsh Medium Schools, and it was noted that

the Statutory Distances would also be applied to Welsh Medium and Faith Schools. Concerns were raised that there has been an increase in the number of pupils attending Welsh Medium Schools which could result in additional costs to the Local Authority in the future. It was suggested that Officers discuss additional funding for transport from Welsh Government.

It was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation, with the addition of seeking support from WG and continue to maintain the current service. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

ET9 – Provision of Transport for Pupils who Change Address in years in 10 – 13.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the provision in place, and raised concerns where change of address is due to parental choices for more desirable schools and suggested implementing a financial penalty. Whilst acknowledging that this is an issue and costly to the Local Authority, Officers advised that there would be little financial benefit, due to the increase in administration costs to facilitate this course of action.

It was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation to maintain the current service. By a show of hands (and in noting that there was 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

ET10 – Provision of Transport for Pupils Residing in Refuges, Hostels or Temporary Housing.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the current provision and agreed that the service should remain, with no changes.

It was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support the Officers recommendation and continue to maintain the service. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

ET11 – Review of Hazardous Routes (Negligible or Low)

The report sought Members consideration of a review of the free transport provided on hazardous walking routes that have been identified as negligible or low risk, but less than the defined policy distance for free transport. At the Scrutiny Committee on 19th June 2014, Members requested clarification on the definition of a hazardous route, the different levels of classification and the locations and the report summarised the response in Appendix 2(2). In 2007, a thorough review was undertaken of walking routes where transport was historically provided, and Officers proposed that routes categorised as negligible or low risk be discontinued for all new pupils from September 2007, but continued for existing pupils until they change schools or entered post-16 education. Members did not support this.

There are concerns that continuing to provide transport over routes identified as low/negligible risk, leaves the Council open to claims from parents for discrimination and precedent. The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure sets out that local authorities have a duty to assess walking routes to schools in line with various guidance documents available.

In addition to the assessment of the relationship between pupils, traffic and the route conditions, there is now a requirement for Council's to also assess the route in the context of social danger and there is a clear expectation from the Minister that the views of the children need to be taken into account.

The following routes are currently identified as negligible or low risk:

Route	Assessment
• The Rise to Coed y Brain Primary	Negligible
• Llanfach to Abercarn Primary	Negligible

• Wattsville to Cwmfelinfach Primary	Negligible
• Hollybush to Markham Primary	Negligible
• The Rise to Lewis Girls Comprehensive	Low
• Croespenmaen to Rhiw Syr Dafydd Primary	Low
• Pwyllypant to Coed y Brain Primary	Low
• Penybryn to Lewis Girls Comprehensive	Low

The total cost of these routes is £91,000 per year with 195 pupils eligible to travel on these contracts. The actual savings may not equate to the current cost of these contracts, as many of these contracts are linked by the transport providers to other routes and terminating part of this link is likely to undermine the viability of the other contracts, resulting in additional costs to the Council to sustain these.

With the exception of post-16 transport, any changes to discretionary policy may result in the Council having to assess safe walking routes to school under the revised guidance. In the longer term, the Council will need to review all walking routes to school in line with new Guidance published last year.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the Scrutiny Committee support an assessment being conducted, under the revised Guidance 2014, on routes which were assessed as negligible or low, with outcomes fed back to the Committee. By a show of hands (and in noting that there was 1 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present).

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and noted that further updates would be provided at the meeting of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee in July.

10. PHYSICAL ACCESS STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS

The report, which was presented by T. Maher (Assistant Director Planning & Strategy) and S. Dixon (Disability Access Officer) provided the Scrutiny Committee with the Physical Access Strategy for Schools in line with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010.

The Physical Access Strategy for Schools, which was produced in 2009, was reviewed in January 2015 and a revised Strategy was produced, detailing the current access status of all Caerphilly Schools, in line with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010. The Strategy previously concentrated on the accessibility arrangements for pupils and employees in line with legislative duties. However, the latest version of the strategy includes advice on the provision of access for disabled parents, without compromising the safety of children or others on the school site, in line with the Equalities Act 2010.

The amended strategy demonstrates an improvement since 2009 in the number of schools which are able to accommodate pupils with physical and medical needs, this is due to investment in school buildings and consultation at planning stage with relevant officers to ensure that accessibility is a key factor in school design, whether designing a new school building or refurbishment of an existing site.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officers for the report and a Member sought further details on the policies and guidance to support access to schools, for Disabled Parents, where reasonable adaptations are not possible. Members noted that Schools endeavour to accommodate parents wherever possible.

Further discussions took place regarding transport and information was sought on accommodating and transporting children with disabilities, where placement in a school local to their home was not possible. K. Cole (Chief Education Officer) explained that parents would be consulted and are often happy to relocate their child to a more accommodating facility, in which case there is budget provision and transport can be provided.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

11. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE PLACED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

There were no requests for items to be placed on the next available agenda.

12. 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. Summary of Members' Attendance – Quarter 2 – 1st July 2014 to 30th September 2014.
2. Summary of Members' Attendance – Quarter 3 – 1 October 2014 – 31 December 2014.
3. Education for Life Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.
4. SACRE Minutes – 6th November 2014.

The meeting closed at 7.34 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 20th May 2015, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR