



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 17TH OCTOBER 2023 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, D. Cushing, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Gordon, T. Heron, A. Leonard, J. Roberts, J. Simmonds, 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: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), A. West (21st Century Schools Manager), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director – Head of Childrens Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director – Adult Services), M.J. Jones (Financial Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Co-opted Members: Mrs T. Millington (Parent Governor Representative), and Mrs K. Cole (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 Councillor S. Skivens, and Mr. M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative), Mr. G. James (Parent Governor Representative), Mrs. P. Ireland (NEU), and Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 12TH SEPTEMBER 2023.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 15 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 12th September 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 7) 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 October 2023 to March 2024.

Members proposed additional report items to be added, including the use of vapes and mobile phones in schools, the causes of winter pressures and education at home. A Member clarified that a Cabinet report regarding children who were unable to attend school, had come before the scrutiny committee in June 2023. Members were also advised that a report on the causes of winter pressures could be brought to Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee at their next meeting at the end of November. The Chair also requested that a report going to Cabinet on 'free school meals' be included as an information item for this scrutiny at the end of November.

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 this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the 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 – YSGOL Y LAWNT AND UPPER RHYMNEY PRIMARY SCHOOL PROPOSAL.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities introduced the report and Members were advised that the purpose of the report was to officially consult with Members in respect of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Programme proposed to relocate Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhydney Primary.

The scrutiny committee sought clarity on how the funding formula for schools operates, and how this will be applied to each school. The public perception is that Welsh medium education is more expensive. Members were assured that the schools will be funded on the same basis through the fair funding formula that is applied to all other schools, and both English medium and Welsh medium are funded on the same basis. If there were any changes to the funding formula this would require a consultation on the funding formula itself.

A Member sought information on the shared facilities which should realise cost savings and asked if those savings would be retained by each school, or whether the local authority would benefit from the savings. The committee were advised that these schools will be net zero and very efficient from an energy perspective. The schools will however still be funded using the current fair funding formula. However, as we move towards more schools being built on a net zero basis the fair funding formula may need to be reviewed in terms of the premises costs.

The scrutiny committee sought clarity on what Band B means and were advised that it is a Welsh Government terminology, which started with Band A that ran until 2019, Band B covers the period 2019 to 2026. This is now changing to a rolling programme with local authorities asked to submit proposals for the next 9 years. This is then broken down into three-year manageable periods, and officers are looking at how that can be done and what can be sent to Welsh Government.

A Member asked what timeframe is anticipated for the completion of the new unit in Pontllanfraith and was advised that the Centre for Vulnerable Learners is due to be completed by the end of 2024.

The scrutiny committee asked what the timeframe is for the completion of the two schools, should the go ahead be achieved. Members were advised that there is a lengthy process in relation to these proposals, this includes our consultation, plus Welsh Government have Panels to consider each Business Case. An outline business case has already been submitted in respect of the first stage which has been approved. Following consultation, it will return to scrutiny on the 28th November 2023, before Cabinet, and if approved the next stage is statutory notice which is planned for early spring 2024, and it is required for 28 days. Following that it returns to scrutiny and Cabinet with the objection report (Welsh Government terminology). It then returns to Welsh Government with the full Business Case, it is hoped that the schools could be completed by September 2027.

The scrutiny committee enquired how the school will be separated and what safeguarding arrangements will be put in place to ensure that people visiting the site will be managed. Members were assured that these will be two separate entities, and each school will have their own areas that they control. There will be a shared reception with a secure area for any visitors, with further separate entrances for children to enter each school.

Members sought reassurance on the protection of the Welsh Language at the school, and queried whether Welsh medium school pupils would be separate from the English speaking pupils. The committee was assured that there will be two separate schools, each will have its own playground, classrooms, and halls. There will however be the ability to open up some areas for community use. The Chair gave the committee her feedback on the visit to a similar type of provision in Cardiff and advised that she felt reassured after the visit that this approach

can work very well. Officers, Scrutiny members, heads and governors met with both headteachers at the Cardiff schools, and they said they felt comfortable that they were operating two separate schools. Officers will work closely with both schools, headteachers and governing bodies to ensure the design meets the needs and demands of both schools.

Members enquired whether the visit to Cardiff schools had picked up any additional information for example, was there any sense of rivalry or animosity between the two schools, or did it appear to be that with Welsh being taught in the English school benefitted from having a Welsh medium school next door. Members were advised that the Welsh medium Cardiff school also had a Welsh Language immersion unit for pupils who had moved into the area from outside Wales and wanted to have an introduction to the language, which has been very successful. Neither Cardiff headteacher raised any concerns of this nature.

The scrutiny committee was also advised that the co-location of these two schools may also provide opportunities to assist professional learning for staff for example, and they could consider holding joint events.

Clarification was sought on whether pupils are also consulted as part of the process and Members were advised that the pupil voice is included in the consultation, and a 'child friendly' version of the consultation document has been prepared.

Members commented on the travel distance of the new schools, and how it compares to the distance travelled to the existing schools. The committee had been advised that there was a 4 minute and 16 minute walk between the existing schools and the new school. However, this is not from their home addresses, so for some families the walk to the new schools will be shorter and others it will be longer, however if this is more than 1.5 miles, they can access free school transport.

Members commented that this model has already been done in CCBC, with Ystrad Mynach Primary school and the Welsh Medium school, which had separate playgrounds etc. and worked well.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and provided comments on the proposals.

8. SCHOOL ORGANISATION CODE 2018 – PROPOSAL FOR THE CLOSURE OF CWM GLAS INFANTS SCHOOL.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities introduced the report to officially consult with Members in respect of 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, 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 a decision was made by the Head Teacher and Governing Body of the School to pursue closure of Cwm Glas Infants School.

Members asked what alternatives to the closure have been explored and would any of these be financially viable. The scrutiny committee were advised that the governing body, as well as officers, have looked at the options but it is not possible to ensure a balanced budget. There are fixed costs that have to be met and with falling pupil numbers it would not be achievable.

The scrutiny committee asked what the plans would be if there was a sudden influx of pupils at Coed y Brain, does it have the resilience to cope. Members were assured that from

September 2024 the 28 pupils from Cwm Glas will be able to transfer, subject to parental preference. There would still be 80 surplus places at Coed y Brain going forward to accommodate any further applications for places.

Members expressed concern about the staff employed at Cwm Glas and asked what will happen to them. The scrutiny committee were advised that subject to Cabinet approval, there would be extensive meetings with HR colleagues and also with the staff concerned, with the aim to redeploy them to vacancies within CCBC if possible.

The scrutiny committee highlighted that 50% of pupils at Cwm Glas live outside the catchment area, and asked if they will go to a school within their catchment area if Cwm Glas closes. Members were advised that is a matter for parental preference.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and provided comments on the proposals.

9. 2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (MONTH 3).

The Cabinet Member for Social Care introduced the report which informed Members of the projected revenue expenditure for Social Services for the 2023/24 financial year and its implications for future financial years. The report identifies the reasons behind a projected underspend of £2,938k for Social Services in 2023/24, inclusive of transport costs, and it will also consider the implications of this projected underspend on Social Services reserve balances and for future financial years.

A Member queried the 330 hours of unmet need and the vacant posts in social care. Members were advised that the recruitment for social care is ongoing but currently very challenging, and the hours of unmet need were reduced to 117 this month.

A Member queried the residential care costs including secure accommodation, and where these would be located. Members were advised that there was not a great 'need' for secure accommodation in Caerphilly, with only one child currently in secure accommodation. Two houses have been purchased to be used as children's homes, one in Aberbargoed and one in Cefn Fforest, with a new build proposed in Rhydney for completion in 2024.

A Member sought clarification on the 'special guardianships' and members were advised that these persons are nearly always close family relatives and are referred to as connected persons. The financial elements include assessments of the persons and no financial loss to those taking care of children who are, in effect, 'fostering' those children, even though they are related.

A Member queried the Gwent Frailty Programme, and whether this was a widely known service and may have contributed to the underspends in this area. Members were advised that the underspends were in relation to recruitment. Members were also advised in relation to the scheme that has a high demand, and persons no longer have to be over 65 to qualify, and GPs' and hospitals can refer persons to this programme if they require it.

A Member sought clarification on the Gwent Missing Children Project. Members were advised that this was a lottery funded project aimed at children who were previously missing, who would be met and interviewed to determine any safeguarding aspects and support required, that needed to be put in place to avoid any further 'missing' episodes. Members were also advised that the funding is due to end, and the regional partnership board is due to discuss the future of the project.

A Member queried the 'other adoption costs' and the families first contracts. Members were advised that the 'other adoption costs' were in relation to children who are more difficult to find adoption places for, and these are registered with independent agencies in order to find

adoptive places anywhere in the UK. Some adopters need financial support and where a child is placed outside of the Caerphilly Borough, the authority would still remain financially responsible for the child for up to 3 years, and after this time would then transfer to the local authority area in which they lived. These costs would also include children who lived outside of the area and had their adoptive place within Caerphilly Borough.

Members were also advised that 'families first' was Welsh Government grant funded, which covered early intervention and prevention services. The extra costs included the additional services provided by CCBC, and members were advised that families first funding information would be circulated to members following the meeting.

A Member clarified that the projected underspend of £2,938k would not be the final figure as this was only projected. Members were advised that these figures were based on the current figures in June and the estimated costs going forward based on these figures.

A Member queried the £43k underspend in the Youth Offending Service and discussion followed regarding whether a reimbursement to CCBC would occur, given rising costs of the service in the future.

A Member sought clarification on the support given to asylum seeking children and whether they are placed with families or children's homes within the Borough. Members were advised that the Home Office had introduced the National Transfer Scheme last year, which can allow a rapid response to unaccompanied children that can be moved from Kent to anywhere in the UK, and each local authority in the UK has a target to meet in relation to supporting these children. Members were advised that the majority of the children have a good understanding of the English language and language difficulties rarely occur, although interpretation services are available.

A Member clarified that the underspend in adult services for home care, related directly to the lack of staff. The Member also clarified that the vacancies in adult services had increased, and that 'other costs' related to the workforce development team shared with Blaenau Gwent, which provided support across the directorate, and also 'other costs' would include IT support, insurance, and DBS checks.

The Chair sought clarification on the projected commitments within adult services and whether any contingency had been considered. Members were advised that contingency is built in, in respect of day services provision and there is some provision for increasing costs, however staffing issues create increased difficulty with regards to any contingency.

The Chair also queried the closure of the South View Residential Home in the Borough that was used and funded by Rhondda Cynon Taff. Members were advised that RCT had now moved the residents out of this property as it was no longer meeting their needs, and that CCBC were looking to repurpose the building for use.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 28th November 2023.

CHAIR