

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Wednesday 9th April, 2014 at 5.05pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) C Leyshon – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

M Adams	(Mrs) J Bunnage	(Mrs) A Calvert	J Elliott
S Evans-Fear	M Griffiths	P Jarman	(Mrs) S Jones
R Lewis	B Morgan	G Smith	B Stephens
G Thomas	L Walker		

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mr J Fish – Parent Governor

Officers in Attendance:

Mr C Bradshaw - Director, Education & Lifelong Learning
Ms E Thomas – Service Director, Schools and Community
Mr N Elliot – Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing
Ms C Edwards – Head of Financial Services, Education
Ms G Davies – Acting Service Director, Access, Engagement & Inclusion
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Mr N Jones – Service Director, Operational Finance
Mr L Gripton – Director, Customer Care & ICT
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation

71 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A L Davies (MBE), C Williams, and co-opted Members Mrs S Sevany, Mrs C Jones, Mr C Jones, Mr D Price and Mr A Minton.

72 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

73 MINUTES

RESOLVED: - to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee of the 12th March, 2014.

74 ICT ENABLED SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME.

The Director, Customer Care & ICT provided the Committee with a PowerPoint presentation regarding the 'ICT enabled Schools Transformation Programme'. The Committee were provided with an overview of the programme, which was the largest managed programme of ICT modernisation across all RCT schools to date. The committee were advised that the programme would deliver a range of technological building blocks to aid connected ways of teaching and learning and also provide access to innovative digital media and e-learning for teachers and pupils. Other benefits of the programme were outlined to the Committee in respect of the improved pupil and teacher access to safe learning tools and digital content and also enable learning to be brought to life via use of more innovative technology in the classroom. The Director of Customer Care & ICT further advised the Committee that the programme was also in part collaboration with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

Following an overview of the programme the Committee were provided with details regarding funding of the project with the Director advising that over £6.7m of external funding had been achieved to support the programme. Details regarding the programme deliverables were provided in detail to the Members with proposed timescales for completion also identified. One aspect of the programme related to the provision for all schools, to access the online Microsoft "IT Academy" for teacher professional development and pupil e-learning and development. The Director of Customer Care & ICT commented that it was the intention that some schools would have the opportunity to become IT Academy accreditation centres, which could provide opportunities for extended community learning in the future. Members were advised that a pilot of the arrangements is being undertaken within 7 schools within the County Borough and it was also advised that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is the second whole regional area in Europe to commit to the initiative (first in Wales), allowing the programme to benefit from additional Microsoft support.

The Director of Customer Care & ICT concluded his presentation by providing the Committee with details of the next steps, with broadband connections being scheduled to be completed by the end of July 2014 as the main priority. The Director also commented that another priority is to recruit and enable additional temporary resources to assist schools in getting best use out of new technology. The Director concluded by advising the Committee of the invitation by the Welsh Government to showcase the programme at a future All Wales event to disseminate good practice to other local authorities.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Director of Customer Care & ICT for the detailed presentation and opened the item up for Members questions.

One Member of the Committee commented on the implementation of the programme for all schools and queried whether some of the initial teething issues with implementation had since been resolved. The Director confirmed that implementation was complex due to the scale of the project, and issues

outside of our control, and although some initial problems had been experienced these had all be rectified.

Another member queried the proposed target date of July 2014, and it was questioned whether this was a target set by Rhondda Cynon Taf or by the Welsh Government. The Director of Customer Care & ICT explained that the target was a Welsh Government target, although he personally commented that this target may be delayed due to the slow pace across Wales overall and the dependencies on key suppliers such as BT.

Safeguarding of information was also an area that Members drew attention to, and the Director advised that the programme in keeping with, and enabling improvements upon the Principle of the Data Protection Act, commenting on the positive e-safety work underway and that wider awareness raising and training for all Head Teachers regarding their information management obligations is being planned.

Members commented on the positive news with the programme and the Director of Customer Care & ICT was challenged on how the school would link with pupils home access to ICT facilities, with the member querying the percentage of pupils who do not have access to ICT within their home environment. The Director commented that 74% of adults (i.e. parents also) were deemed "digitally inclusive" in RCT (source: Communities 2.0) but that he did not have statistics in relation to children to hand, although the programme provides wider will enable extended learning and improved monitoring / tracking data.

Another member followed this line of enquiry by referring to the transformation programme's opportunities to allow pupils to take devices into schools. The Member continued by advising that not all children could afford devices and therefore queried what provisions would be in place to ensure pupils were not disadvantaged. The Director of Customer Care & ICT advised that the ability for pupils to "bring their own device" is a policy decision for each individual school. The Director also advised the Committee of the 'Getonline@home' initiative involving the recycling of refurbished PC's with internet access for 1 year available for £99 but that he is currently working with a Credit Union in RCT to assess the opportunity to promote an affordable payment plan approach for RCT citizens.

One member of the Committee commented on the positive benefits of 'Moodle' for both pupils and parents and queried whether funding was in place to increase access to Moodle in light of the 'Hwb' (All Wales Virtual Learning Environment led by the Department for Education & Skills, WG). The Committee were advised that Glamorgan University were currently hosting instances of Moodle for some schools and discussions are being had with Moodle users on their current and future needs and then how the Council / University of Glamorgan may be able to provide ongoing support and also seek to migrate valuable Moodle content onto Hwb.

Members commented on the Microsoft academy and the need for pupils to receive a full breadth of knowledge of all ICT environments e.g. hardware build/maintenance and not just a knowledge with Microsoft Office etc. The Director advised that the Microsoft IT Academy provided recognised technical, non-technical and also non-Microsoft proprietary tools, learning and development pathways e.g. Certified Engineering as well as Gaming / App development etc. The Director further advised that the Academy approach complements the wider ICT competency and curriculum (work needs to be done with Microsoft and Welsh Government to ensure that any mainstream education opportunities are not missed i.e. that it does not compete with the curriculum going forward).

Discussions were concluded with one Member reiterating the importance of parent development within the area as well as development for pupils and teachers.

Following discussions the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the presentation.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES.

75 OUTCOME AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE WELSH GOVERNMENT AND RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL 2013/14 TO 2015/16

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided Members of the Committee with an overview of the report, which advised of the Outcome Agreement between the Welsh Government and the Council for the period 2013/14 to 2015/16 as agreed by Cabinet on the 19th March, 2014.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided some background to the report, explaining that the maximum funding available to the Council through the Welsh Government's Outcome Agreement revenue grant was £2.5m per year, although this funding was based on performance results. It was also advised that this year, to assist local authorities in completing their Outcome Agreements, the Welsh Government had produced a guidance document, which the Authority had utilised when producing its agreement.

The Committee were advised that to ensure the outcome agreement performance was effectively managed, updates would be incorporated into the existing performance reporting arrangements and be subject to review and challenge by the Council's scrutiny committees to help improve outcomes in the five strategic themes selected. Members were advised of the five outcome themes identified by the Council, with one being aligned to the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee for review, namely 'Education'.

One Member of the Committee queried the scrutiny arrangements for scrutiny of the Joint Education Service, who are commissioned to drive school

improvement within schools in the County Borough. The Member also commented on the tackling poverty agenda, indicating that education should assist in illuminating poverty and highlighted that the tackling poverty agenda should be enshrined throughout the Outcome Agreement. The Director Education & Lifelong Learning advised of the Welsh Government's recommendations regarding scrutiny arrangements for the Joint Education Service and confirmed that the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee would be responsible for scrutiny of the Joint Education Service. The Service Director, Performance & Improvement commented upon the tackling poverty agenda advising that the 5 strategic themes approved by Cabinet also intended to make a positive contribution to this agenda.

The service Director, Performance & Improvement was also questioned on previous outcome agreement performance by other local authorities and the Service Director indicated that during 2012/13 a small number of councils did not receive the full grant funding, adding again to the importance of the production of robust plans and effective scrutiny.

Following consideration of the report the Committee **RESOLVED** to:-

- a) Note the content of the report
- b) Endorse the proposed allocation of the Education strategic theme to the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee for the period of the agreement

76 **PROPOSED SCRUTINY PROCESS OF THE CORPORATE PLAN 2014/15.**

The Principal Solicitor referred members to the report before them, which outlined the proposed scrutiny arrangements for the production of the Council's 2014/15 Corporate Plan.

Members were advised of the duties placed on local authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the requirements to publish their improvement objectives annually, in the form of 'Wales Programme for Improvement action plans'. The Principal Solicitor advised Members that the WPI action plans would be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan, which would be published in June and the Annual Delivery Report, assessing progress against improvement objectives would be published in October of each year. The Principal Solicitor took the opportunity to advise of the Council's previous development of the WPI action plans, which involved mainly officer input.

The Committee were advised that to further strengthen scrutiny arrangements, it was proposed that scrutiny working groups be established to scrutinise each of the WPI action plans. The Principal Solicitor proceeded to advise that the findings from each working group would be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, before the Corporate Plan

is considered at the Council meeting in June, prior to the statutory deadline of the 30th June. The officer also advised of the proposal that the appropriate Cabinet member would be in attendance at each of the working group meetings.

The Principal Solicitor referred the committee to the timetable, highlighting the proposal that a joint working group be formed from the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to consider two WPI action plans: 'Children's Services' and 'Education'. The Principal Solicitor also highlighted the intention for the working groups to be reconvened at year end for members to assess the 'difference made' by WPI action plans as part of the Council's Annual Delivery Report.

Following consideration of the report the Committee **RESOLVED** to:-

- a) Approve the proposed process and timescales, as set out in the report
- b) Establish a joint working group of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee and Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the WPI Action Plans in relation to Children's Services and Education.
- c) That an email seeking nominations to the working group be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

77 EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT- 31st DECEMBER 2013 (QUARTER 3).

The Head of Financial Services, Education presented to Members the Exception Report agreed at the meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny, which outlined the financial and performance management information for Education & Lifelong Learning for the period to 31ST December 2013. Members were asked to consider key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 19th March, 2014.

One member of the Committee commented on the number of learning classes held within the libraries of the County Borough and officers were questioned as to the type of activity classes that were involved and the impact on the activities in the future, following the phase one cuts to library services. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised the Committee that the classes referred to Adult Education Classes run by the Council and the Director continued by advising that the potential impact to the running of the classes following the closure of identified libraries in the phase one service cuts was considered during the consultation phase, with alternative venues considered. The Director commented on the reduction of budget to the Adult Education service due to cuts from the Welsh government and the cuts from the college franchise, therefore impacting on what classes the Council will be able to deliver in the future.

Another member of the Committee commented on the positive improved performance with the pupils achieving L2 threshold including a GCSE grade A* - C in English, Welsh and Maths, although the Councils target had not been achieved. The member continued by querying the strategies going forward in this area to further increase performance and also queried the strategy of reducing the number of GCSEs sat by pupils. The Service Director, Schools and Community advised the Committee that the reference to the reduction in the number of GCSEs taken forward by a pupil was not a blanket strategy, and was a short term strategy for identified pupils. The Service Director commented upon the recent drive with high impact strategies and commented that the results of which would be visible following Key Stage 4 results.

One Member of the Committee commented upon the action within the WPI report in respect of Schools producing a 3year financial plan, with the member commenting on the difficulties experienced as a Governor of a school, in completing the plan due to lack of information. The Head of Finance, Education confirmed that all schools should be able to produce a plan, although confirmed that some information would need to be estimated, due to limited information from the Welsh Government.

Members of the Committee commented upon the underperformance in 3 out of the 19 primary clusters in respect of maths and the Service Director, Schools and Community commented on the lack of confidence by some primary school teachers when teaching maths and details regarding the delivery of programmes to improve the issues were highlighted, including match funding by schools to deliver the programmes. The Committee were advised that the 'Big Maths' programme was to be reviewed in the near future, and the results of which would be brought back to the Committee for information. Members commented upon the lack of confidence by teachers and questioned the maths skills training they were receiving during teacher training. The Service Director advised the Committee that when recruiting schools try to ensure a higher level of maths than previously and agreed that the teaching cycle with maths needed to improve.

One member of the committee commented upon the positive figures in relation to library attendance and commented that many attendees were able to access their local library on foot and it was queried whether funding for transportation to the libraries would be provided following the implementation of the phase 1 cuts to library services. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning confirmed that funding in respect of transportation was not available and commented on the use of the mobile library and the intention of expanding the school library service for people to access.

The officers in attendance were also queried on the reports referral to the remodelling of Behaviour support and the 'indirect' model of delivery was queried. The Acting Service Director, Access, Engagement advised members of the high level of referrals and the capacity issues within the service and the need to readdress the delivery model. The Committee were advised of the

introduction of 4 specialist teachers providing teaching at a more strategic level, allowing a better practice across whole school level. The Acting Service Director, Access, Engagement & Inclusion also advised of the review of the behaviour strategy and the merger of the Health & Well Being and Behaviour strategy and the benefits with a more coordinated approach.

Clarification on the rationale for target setting in relation to School Attendance was queried by one Member of the Committee and the Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised of the factors taken into consideration when setting the attendance targets. The Committee were advised that the national targets were considered, the Welsh Government benchmark, the current performance of the school, the schools environment including factors such as FSM indicator, deprivation and previous pupil attendance data. The Director confirmed that the targets set within the WPI were Authority based targets, which were both aspirational and challenging. Another Member commented further on the FSM indicator, commenting that all children should be taught on ability, irrespective of background. The Service Director Schools and Community agreed with the comments but advised that there was data to illustrate that pupils on FSM under performed in comparison to those that were not and commented that improvements in this area, of narrowing the gap in performance was a recognised priority for the Welsh Government. The Service Director advised the Committee of the support mechanisms in place to try to eliminate the gap that currently exists. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning also commented on the issue, agreeing with the Committee that deprivation in areas across the Authority should not be used as an excuse for under performance but reiterated that there was correlation between higher level of FSM and lower levels of attainment and attendance.

Comments in relation to the performance of pupils in respect of GCSE English was highlighted by one member of the Committee, who further queried whether the Director, Education & Lifelong Learning had any intention of offering 19 Secondary Schools within the County Borough funding for their pupils to re-sit their English GCSE exams following the recent English GCSE exam results and the costs on the schools to provide re-sit examinations. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised the Committee of the funding provided to Schools by the Authority, which was over and above what other Authorities provide and that there was no intention to provide further funding for re-sit examinations.

One member of the Committee also commented upon the proposed introduction of the Fixed Penalty Notices in respect of pupil attendance and the 'authorised exceptions' to the scheme, questioning whether too many of these would undermine the integrity of the scheme. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning commented that the scheme would be adapted to ensure that it was 'fit for purpose', with a common sense approach in relation to authorised exceptions and commented that the purpose was to tackle those absences that could be prevented. The Director referred to the positive impact noted in England, where the scheme was already in place.

Officers were queried in relation to the proposed action to review the special needs classes in mainstream provision and the potential disruption to vulnerable children. The Acting Service Director, Access, Engagement & Inclusion advised the Committee that a report outlining the changes was presented to Cabinet the day before and spoke of the proposals in place and the changes to be made. The Head of confirmed that where possible disruption would be kept to a minimal but confirmed that the review was in the children's best interests.

Queries upon engagement with EOTAS pupils were highlighted by one Member of the Committee and the Service Director Schools and Community commented upon the large changes to the service since September, in respect of the provisions to address teaching and learning, the relocation of Ty Catrin to Ty Gwyn, the utilisation of taxi services and the improved links with College Y Cymoedd, which should assist in future years with pupil engagement.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

78 FFRAMWAITH.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing thanked the Committee for the invitation to attend the meeting to discuss the committee's recent concerns in respect of the Fframwaith Partnership Board and continued by commenting on the difficulties experienced by some members in respect of accessing documents from the Fframwaith partnership Board's website. The Service Director requested Members to advise him of any access problems in the future so that the problem could be rectified. The Service Director also referred to the previous information circulated to the Committee in relation to the Terms of Office of the Partnership Board, and agreed to resend the information for member's information.

For the benefit of new members to the committee the Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing provided the Committee with a brief background to the role of the Fframwaith partnership. Committee members were advised that Fframwaith was Rhondda Cynon Taf's Children & Young People's partnership, acting as a multi agency partnership intended to improve the outcomes for children and young people aged 0-25 by promoting local co-operation amongst agencies. The officer also advised that the partnership was structured to fulfil the requirements of the Children's Act 2004, although there was no longer a statutory requirement for the production of a Children's and Young People Plan. The Committee heard that currently Fframwaith's main role was in respect of strategic planning, commissioning of services and dedicated funding and also advocacy of the rights of the children.

Following the brief overview the Service Director confirmed that since its origination back in 2004 the partnership had not been reviewed, although the intention was to complete a review of the Partnership during the formation of the Single Integrated Plan by the Strategic Partnership review. The Service

Director confirmed that this review was now intended to be undertaken during the forthcoming summer months.

Members of the Committee spoke of their concerns with the current Fframwaith partnership Board, commenting on potential duplication of work in the partnerships current form, concerns regarding accountability and the urgency needed for the Partnership to be reviewed to ensure that it was 'fit for purpose' going forward.

Following the Committee's discussions it was **RESOLVED**:-

- a) To note the contents of the verbal report
- b) That the Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing attend future Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee meetings on a quarterly basis to provide the Committee with updates in respect of the work of the Fframwaith partnership.
- c) That the Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing provide feedback to the committee on the outcome of the Fframwaith partnership review

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7.45pm