

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, 8th April 2015 at 5pm.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

J Elliott	S Evans-Fear
M Griffiths	P Jarman
(Mrs) S Jones	B Morgan
G Smith	L G Walker
C Williams	

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mr J Fish – Parent Governor
Mrs S Jones – Parent Governor
Mr M. Cleverley – NASUWT and Teachers Panel
Mr D Price - UNISON

Officers in Attendance:

Mrs E Thomas – Service Director for Schools & Community
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Ms S Davies – Head of Education & Financial Reporting
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation

Cabinet Member

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) E Hanagan – Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning

75 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors M Adams, (Mrs) J Bunnage, A L Davies MBE, (Mrs) A Calvert, R Lewis, B Stephens and G Thomas.

An apology for absence was also received from Mr C Jones, Co-opted Member representing the GMB.

76 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

77 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record the Minutes of the meeting of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 11th March 2015.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

78. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT- 31ST DECEMBER 2014 (QUARTER 3).

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement presented Members with 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 2014. Members were advised that in addition to the usual information, appended to the report as Appendix B were examples of feedback received as a result of the work of the service and also for completeness, included as Appendix C was a list of the remaining 15 performance indicators that did not meet target by more than 5% as at Quarter 3. He also explained that no update had been provided in relation to the Welsh Government Outcome Agreement as there had been no significant change in the performance position since Quarter 2. However, a full update would be provided for Quarter 4.

Members were asked to consider the key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to the Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 19th March 2015.

A Member questioned whether the Special Educational Needs overspend was linked to the provision of the new facility at Buarth y Capel for young people with autism.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that the opening of the Buarth y Capel facility was not the reason for the overspend. She explained that the unit is not suitable for some young people and is not a residential facility. However, she hoped that in the long term the Buarth y Capel facility will help reduce the need for some of the more expensive out of county residential placements which are sometimes jointly funded with Children's Services.

Referring to the performance indicator trends contained within the report at page 13, a Member asked whether there was any further information available to assist in understanding the worsening trend.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that the targets set are ambitious and are aimed at continuing year on year improvement in performance. The Service Director also explained that not all of the missed targets were due to the performance of the young people and that performance indicator results, along with

other relevant information, is reviewed on an on-going basis to inform future service planning.

The Member also suggested that the reduction in visits to libraries, including school visits indicated a reduction in the quality of life for service users as a result of library closures.

The Service Director for Schools and Community acknowledged that following the introduction of the service change, the number of visits to libraries had reduced as a result of there being fewer libraries. The Service Director indicated that user information and feedback will continue to be taken into account to help ensure the best possible service and experience for users.

The same Member also referred to Appendix C of the report and the missed targets in relation to attainment levels in both English and Mathematics for Year 7 to 9 pupils and the number of publicly accessible computers. She commented that the performance information did not paint a positive picture.

The Service Director for Schools and Communities explained that the accessibility of computers had been affected as a result of the library closures and work was ongoing to improve the situation. In relation to English and Mathematics attainment, whilst much had already been done, the Service Director acknowledged that there is still more work to do. She also pointed out that changes to the way in which the indicator is now being calculated had impacted on the figures for 2014/15 and as a result a true comparison could not be made.

A Member referred to the figures relating to the Estyn inspection of schools and asked what measures are being put in place to improve the performance of those schools which have been graded as adequate.

The Service Director for Schools and Communities reported that work to improve performance is being undertaken in a number of ways, in particular through the work with Central South Consortium and the work being undertaken with the Governing Bodies. She explained that key to school improvement is good leadership and management and reported that there are a number of leadership and management programmes being used together with work to ensure there are robust processes in place around the quality of recruitment in the workforce. She added that a major part of the work being undertaken by the Consortium is the development of a culture whereby schools learn from each other and by doing so standards are raised. However, she pointed out that these processes would take time to embed and show results.

The Cabinet Member also pointed out that she, along with the Service Director, met regularly with the Senior Leadership Teams and Chair of Governors of those schools in an Estyn follow up category to ensure that there is now a level of challenge present which was not there previously.

A Co-opted Member commented that in his opinion there are far too many performance indicators and he welcomed the move to reduce the numbers. He also

felt that the improvements in performance as signified by the data set out at page 20 of the report (KS4 results) should be viewed as a positive achievement,.

A Member pointed out that as well as being ambitious, targets also have to be realistic. He commented that whilst the data at the key stages is useful, it does not demonstrate how the improvements are going to be achieved.

The Service Director agreed that targets had to be realistic but pointed to the importance of being ambitious in order to stretch the young people. She explained that a programme has been started for the 'more able and talented' which is the Seren Programme aimed at potential Oxbridge or Sutton Trust University candidates. Whilst agreeing with the earlier comment that there are too many performance indicators she pointed out that the service covered a wide area and key indicators had been identified to enable progress to be measured. In response to further questioning on the Seren Programme, the Service Director suggested that Members might wish to receive further information on the programme which has only recently been introduced and proposed that a progress report be brought back to the Committee in six months time.

The Cabinet Member added that the Central South Consortium is very active in ensuring that all head teachers are being challenged to reach targets and ensure the development of teaching staff.

A Member referred to staff sickness levels and in response the Service Director for Schools and Communities explained that all sickness is recorded via the Council's Vision management system. She further explained that a housekeeping exercise is currently underway, for example, to ensure all sickness is recorded timely, accurately and follow up action / support provided, the results of which will be fed into future up dates. She also explained that the service included the Council's catering staff and food hygiene requirements prevents them attending work if they have stomach upsets, this impacting on sickness figures.

A Member questioned how the effectiveness of the Consortium's School Improvement Groups could be measured.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that both Sue Walker and Bernard Whittingham who were Heads of Achievement for Primary and Secondary Schools respectively, held dual roles in that they also acted as Senior Challenge Advisors for the Consortium and as such will scrutinise the work and monitor progress.

The Member also questioned how Critical Improvement Action 3 MO1 which requires that the Council works collaboratively with the Central South Consortium (CSC) in providing School Governor Support will be measured.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that it is intended that some elements of Governor Support services will be approached through the Consortium and pointed out that strong Governing Bodies are key to challenging the senior management and performance of schools. She explained the authorities in the CSC currently have different levels of support for governors whilst Rhondda

Cynon Taf has one of the largest teams. It is intended to work together to improve training and governor access to training is currently being monitored. Governing Bodies are also encouraged to undertake self evaluation which can lead to accredited awards.

The Cabinet Member suggested that it might be a good idea to invite someone from the Consortium to report on the progress being made.

A co-opted Member reported that he represented Rhondda Cynon Taf on the Consortium's Governor Steering Group and he explained that he would welcome the opportunity to report back to the Committee individually or alongside the relevant officer on the work being undertaken.

The co-opted Member also explained that he had a number of questions which he wanted to be clear about which related to the prospects for improvement. Firstly, is there the capacity to close the gap between the current standards and the targets, secondly, how many of those indicators showing as red are statutory and lastly, has the drop in target performance arisen because the targets have been increased.

The Service Director for Schools and Community responded that she did feel that there is capacity to improve even further. She explained that since Estyn had taken the decision that further monitoring of the local authority was not required, school performance had not worsened. She also commented that there is now an appetite within the schools themselves to tackle the issue of underperforming staff which will improve teaching and learning and work is ongoing with trade union support where there are competence issues.

With reference to the performance measures, the Service Director, Performance and Improvement explained that over time the number of statutory performance indicators had reduced and the majority of indicators reported as 'red' as at December 2014 were local indicators. With regard to target setting, he reiterated that the overall aim for Education has been to set ambitious targets and indicated that a range of information is taken into account to inform this process including previous performance results, known changes in future service delivery and the professional judgement of officers. He reminded the Committee that Scrutiny Working Groups would be meeting in the coming weeks to provide a challenge in this area, including target setting.

In response to a further query, the Service Director, Performance and Improvement clarified that the 26% of indicators that did not hit target by more than 5% were spread across the Education priority action plan and the Data Table that was included within the main quarter 3 Performance Report.

A Member referred to the Health Check measures and the drop in the number of activities undertaken by young people in comparison with the previous year.

The Service Director for Schools and Community commented that the Youth Service had been reconfigured, providing a more targeted rather than universal provision, around the school cluster groups.

A Member referred to the introduction of the Welsh Government's Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant and pointed out that schools are anxious to have more information in relation to the payment of the grant in order to plan for the new academic year.

The Service Director, Schools and Community reported that she would obtain the information available and circulate to all Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) that a progress report on the Seren Programme be presented to a future meeting of the Committee in approximately six months time.
- (iii) that the Central South Consortium be invited to send a representative to a future meeting of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee to provide a progress report on the work being undertaken in strengthening the governing support services to schools.

79. LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE: SELF EVALUATION REPORT APRIL 2015

The Service Director for Schools and Community presented the Committee with the draft self evaluation report for Education Services for Children and Young People in Rhondda Cynon Taf April 2015. She explained that the self evaluation identifies areas for improvement, which will be prioritised and actions will be assigned to individual services which will then be included in their operational business plans. The Self Evaluation report will also be used to inform the Education priorities which are included in the Council's WPI plan.

A co-opted Member questioned the capacity of the Central South Consortium to support those schools in the amber and red categories to improve.

The Service Director for Schools and Community reported that the Consortium believed that it did. She referred to the move toward self improvement rather than a 'top down' approach and added that those schools designated amber and red currently attract a high level of support which she didn't envisage changing in the short/medium term.

A Member referred to the £2.7m Additional Needs funding which has been delegated to 17 local cluster groups since April 2013.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that the pot of money previously held centrally within Access and Inclusion was now delegated across the school clusters for them to manage themselves. The use of this funding is monitored.

A Member commented that she felt that there was a need for more information in relation to the work of the Central South Consortium in order to hold them to account. She also pointed out that whilst work is being

undertaken to improve the standards of education, she questioned the opportunities available to young people now that funding for projects such as Bridges into Work and Jobs Growth Wales had halted.

In response the Chair reported that she would arrange for a representative from the Central South Consortium to undertake an information session at the September meeting of the Consortium.

The Service Director for Schools and Community reported that the uncertainty in relation to grant funded projects was a challenge for all service areas and it was hoped that services would have access to some ESF money if bids are successful and it becomes available.

A Co-opted member commented that as there is little that the Council can do in terms of bringing jobs to the area the focus has to be on educational attainment. He added that whilst the Council is making progress this needs to be kept in perspective as there is still a wide gap in attainment when comparing with the very best.

A Member commented on the complaints training which has been introduced for schools governors which she reported as being very good. She suggested that it should be mandatory alongside the finance module. She suggested that the presentation she had received as part of the training would be informative for the Committee.

The Member also felt that it would be useful if the Governor Support service could assist in providing the necessary skills to enable governors to undertake self analysis.

The Service Director, Schools and Communities agreed that this could be built into the governor support function and the co-opted Member informed the Committee that the Consortium's Governor Steering Group is already in the process of developing a training package.

A Member questioned how the self evaluation report could be used commenting that whilst some parts contained evaluation information other areas were only contained commentary.

The Service Director for Schools and Communities explained that the Heads of Service would draw on the report to develop their service plans. She also explained that if the report had been produced in preparation for an Estyn inspection it would have included evaluative comments. During the next stage of the Self Evaluation Cycle Heads of Service will be required to identify areas for further development.

A Member referred to the musical activities for 2014/15 set out in the report and questioned the position for the Music Service post September.

The Service Director for Schools and Communities reported that the consultation process in respect of the reconfiguration of the Music Service had been completed. She explained that the School Music Service would continue subject to the schools buying in to service level agreements and these were in the process of being formulated.

The Chair suggested that the outcome of these negotiations be brought back to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the content of the report and self evaluation report;
- (ii) to endorse the contents of the report as it sets out the position of the Council's education services;
- (iii) that the following be included as part of the future work programme for the Committee:
 - (a) an information session in respect of the work of the Central South Consortium;
 - (b) the Schools Employment Co-ordinator be invited to make a presentation to the Committee.
 - (c) an update report in respect of the reconfiguration of the Music Service.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.14 pm.