

**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 Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014 at 5pm.

**Present:**

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

**County Borough Councillors:**

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

**Co-Opted Members:-**

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor  
Mr J Fish – Parent Governor  
Ms S Sevany – Parent Governor  
Mr M Cleverley – NASUWT and Teachers Panel  
Mr C Jones -GMB  
Mr D Price - unison

**Officers in Attendance:**

Mr C Bradshaw - Director, Education & Lifelong Learning  
Ms E Thomas – Service Director for Schools and Community  
Ms S Walker – Head of Achievement, Primary & Senior Challenge Advisor  
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance and Improvement  
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation

**26 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence was received from County Borough Councillor C Williams and co-opted member Ms C Jones.

**27 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, the following personal and non prejudicial declaration of interest was made in relation to agenda item 5 – Council’s Literacy Strategy.

County Borough Councillor B Morgan – “I am a school governor of a school mentioned”.

## **28 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committees held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2014.

### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

#### **29. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT- 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2014 (QUARTER 1).**

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement presented Members with the Exception Report agreed at the meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny held on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014, which outlined the financial and performance management information for Education & Lifelong Learning for the period to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Members were asked to consider key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to the Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2014.

A Member queried the Healthcheck data which summarised Estyn inspection results on a 3 year rolling basis and questioned why performance had deteriorated in year 2.

The Director, Education and Lifelong Learning explained that the Estyn inspection results in the Healthcheck represented three different and distinct areas of performance and not the same measure over a three year period; based on this, the interpretation of performance deteriorating was not relevant in this particular case. The Director also explained that overall performance results were improving and drew Members attention to Estyn's view of future prospects in schools: 72.7% of schools graded at least good, 25.0% adequate and 2.3% unsatisfactory for presenting prospects for improvement. –The Director went on to indicate that although a number of performance indicators had not met the expected level, this was due to setting ambitious targets for schools and the Council to attain, and reflected the aspiration for every school to become a great school. The Director provided some examples of the high aspirations being strived for: aiming for 90% of schools inspected by Estyn being graded as at least 'Good' for leadership on a 3 year rolling basis and aiming for 90% schools inspected by Estyn being graded as least 'Good' for teaching on a 3 yr rolling basis.

The Member also questioned the capital funding for Y Pant Comprehensive School which in the report set out that £24m had been allocated in total for the next four years but that £22m had been allocated to the current three year capital programme – 2014/15 to 2016/17. She questioned whether this funding was part grant and part loan and also questioned the total cost of the project.

The Director, Education and Lifelong Learning explained that the funding package comprised of both Welsh Government and Council resources, with the Council utilising Prudential Borrowing. The Director also indicated that the planned profile of expenditure would see £22m being spent over the next three years (2014/15 to 2016/17) and for this reason this figure had been included in the current three year Capital Programme. The Director went on to indicate that the remaining £2m was profiled to be spent in 2017/18 and would be brought into next year's three year

Capital Programme; it was also noted that toward the end of projects, specific funding is retained to deal with 'snagging issues' with contractors.

With regard to the critical improvement action to continue to improve school attendance rates, a Member drew attention to the recent publication of a guidance leaflet "A Parents' Guide to Managing Sickness Absence from School" issued by the Central South Consortium. The Member reported that she had already been in discussion with the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning with regard to concerns that the usefulness of the information within the leaflet had been diluted by poor presentation of the information.

The Director, Education and Lifelong Learning reported that the document clearly set out that the information is for guidance and the medical advice printed had been obtained directly from Public Health England (Guidance on infection control in schools and other childcare settings – September 2014) in conjunction with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. The Director added that consultation had been carried out with the three Health Boards which covered the five local authority areas of the Central South Consortium i.e. Cwm Taf, Cardiff and the Vale and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Boards, and Public Health Wales had also approved the content.

The Member pointed out that whilst the document had been approved by health professionals that perhaps there should have been a parent perspective in its drafting.

A Member referred to the modernisation work being undertaken in schools which were listed at page 38 of the agenda pack. She questioned whether this was a comprehensive list.

The Director, Education and Lifelong Learning reported that the information contained in the Action Plan was a summary of the work and represented the range of schemes being undertaken through the Capital Programme. He added that he could provide a list of all projects if Members wished and this was agreed by the Committee.

A Member referred to the pie chart depicting those performance measures which had either hit target, came within 5% of the target or had not met target. The Member indicated that whilst some performance indicators were clearly very important such as those relating to attainment, with regard to others such as a delay in a report being presented to Cabinet, this was less important and felt that it would be more meaningful if these could be separated out.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement explained that only performance indicator results were fed into the pie chart to ensure an 'at a glance' picture of performance is presented. The Service Director provided reassurance that the progress of actions, for example, whether a report was presented to Cabinet in line with timescales originally planned, would not be part of the pie chart analysis. The Service Director went on to indicate that further explanation would be included in future Exception Reports to make this clear for the reader.

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

## **REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING**

### **30. DETAILED END OF KEY STAGE PERFORMANCE FOUNDATION PHASE TO KEY STAGE THREE INCLUDING PROGRESS AND SCHOOL CATEGORISATION.**

In her role as Senior Challenge Advisor, the Head of Achievement, Primary reported to Members on the detailed analysis of end of key stage data for 2014, including the progress made by the cohorts from key stage one to two and key stage two to three. She drew Members' attention to the pie charts at appendix 1 which provided a pictorial breakdown of each area assessed at each key stage explaining that Rhondda Cynon Taf was aspiring to 2 levels of progress; and to appendix two, which indicated the levels of progress learners in Key Stages 2 and 5 had made and concluded that it was an improving trend across the local authority.

The Senior Challenge Advisor also reported on the development of a new form of school categorisation being developed by the Central South Consortium based on performance and capacity for improvement and explained that the chart at appendix 3 highlighted the spread of schools in each category for 2013 and 2014. She also pointed out that the level of support a school received from the Consortium is dependent on its category.

The Senior Challenge Advisor also explained that from this academic year, all schools including primary schools will be given a 'standards' grading from Welsh Government and that this grading, along with a judgement of capacity to improve which would be determined by the Headteacher, governing body and challenge advisor would lead to an overall category of support for the school using the matrix which was at appendix 4.

Following the presentation of the report, officers responded to Members; queries explaining how the categorisation matrix at appendix 4 linked to the level of support provided to schools and that those in the yellow/green areas were moving toward self improvement.

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning explained that the new system replaced the school banding system and had the potential benefit of ultimately every school being an A1 school whereas the previous system of banding schools operated like a league table which meant that someone had to be at the bottom.

It was commented by a co-opted Member that whilst he could see the merits of the new system it did in effect discriminate against those who were colour blind.

Following a Member's concern that the new National Grading system might result in schools being disappointed with the outcome, the Senior Challenge Advisor reported that it was her expectation that around 95% of schools would not change category, due in part to the moderation sessions which would be undertaken to ensure equality and consistency.

Officers were questioned as to whether the Governing bodies had been prepared for the new arrangements and the Committee was informed that all Chairs of Governors had been sent letters along with guidance notes. The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that it was intended to provide training for Governors on the day. She explained that whilst this approach was taken partly due to the tight timescales, it was felt that having the training alongside the data would be more beneficial.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED:**

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) that a progress report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

### **31. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL'S LITERACY STRATEGY**

The Head of Achievement, Primary provided Members with an update report on the progress and impact of the Strategy for Raising Achievement in Literacy in Rhondda Cynon Taf which aspires to achieve 'zero tolerance of illiteracy' for all children, young people and adults within the County Borough and is also intended to link with and compliment the Welsh Government's National Literacy Programme and the Central South Consortium Literacy Strategy.

The report provided details of the work undertaken to support each of the 6 core elements of the strategy since the last report presented to Members in October 2013. Further to the 97 whole day literacy reviews undertaken across Infant, Primary and Junior schools in 2013, Members were informed of the positive progress with regard to those 46 schools that had undertaken a follow up review. Members were also provided with information in relation to the work to support those schools involved in the Success for All programme and well as information in relation to the intensive literacy support provided by the Central South Consortium to Rhondda Cynon Taf Schools during the first three tranches.

The Committee was further advised that the Statutory Welsh Government reading tests which were first introduced in May 2013 had been undertaken once again in May 2014. All children received a standardised score but due to uncertainty of the validity of using reading age as an accurate measure of performance these were not given this year. The report provided Members with a summary of the standardised scores, which included those in special schools but excluded the optional test results for year 3 pupils studying Welsh first language. The average score is 100 and analysis of the results for Rhondda Cynon Taf showed that 60% of children who sat the tests had a standardised score over 95%, this is slightly down on the 2013 figure of 67.4%. However, this can be partly explained by the re-standardisation of the tests for this year following significant issues raised with NFER and Welsh Government after the 2013 tests.

Following presentation of the report officers responded to Members' queries. In conclusion, Members proposed that a glossary of the terms used in education reports would be helpful, especially for new Members and that it would also be

beneficial for the Committee to receive briefing updates on new policies/strategies perhaps held before committee meetings when necessary. The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning agreed that this would be useful and would take the matter in hand if Members so wished.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) that a glossary of terms be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- (iii) that arrangements be made to deliver briefing sessions to the Education & Lifelong Learning Committee as and when required.

### **32. FEEDBACK ON ESTYN'S MONITORING VISIT 30 JUNE – 3 JULY 2014**

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning reported to Members on the feedback from Estyn in repose to their monitoring of the Council's progress in improving its Education services for children and young people.

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning was pleased to report that Estyn had concluded that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council was no longer in need of Estyn monitoring and that there would be no further follow up activity. He added that whilst progress had been made collectively, he reminded Members that there was still a considerable amount of work to be undertaken which is borne out by the data considered by the Committee. However, he pointed out that it was particularly pleasing for Members to see the improvement in areas which the Committee had a key role, such as school attendance and providing a stronger scrutiny challenge through the better use of data.

Members welcomed the positive letter from Estyn and the acknowledgement of scrutiny's contribution. It was commented that further improvement was needed and that the Authority should aim for a school attendance record that was above the Welsh average. In conclusion, Members reminded officers that an update in relation to the Fframwaith Children and Young People's Partnership was outstanding.

**RESOLVED** to note the content of the report.

### **33. THE GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICE IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning provided the Committee with a report which provided an overview of the Governor Support Service to schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning explained that the Council offered all its schools a comprehensive Governor Support Service by means of a Service Level Agreement, a copy of which was attached to the report. He explained that this full clerking service was taken up by all Primary schools and 6 of the secondary schools. The remaining 11 secondary schools purchase the telephone/e'mail 'helpline' service. The service also offered a comprehensive training programme for

governors with priority given to those sessions which form part of the Welsh Government's mandatory training programme for school governors and also provide training to those secondary schools who appoint their own clerk to support their governing bodies. The Director explained that the cost of operating the service is £364k per year whilst £240k of this recouped through the fees received from schools for the service. The report also provided an overview of the role of the Governor Support Service in assisting schools to fill vacant governor positions.

In response to questioning, the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning explained that the subscription to the 'QGP on line information service' had been withdrawn due to lack of use. In response to a further question the Service Director for Schools & Community confirmed that the money saved had been re-invested in the Governor Support Service.

A Member pointed out that in his experience of sitting on the Audit Committee, those schools that used the Council's Governor's Support Service had more positive audit reports than those that did not.

A Member asked whether there was any risk to the service given that it was a subsidised service, especially if schools found that they had to reduce the number of hours of support they purchased should they no longer receive any uplift in their budget.

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning reported that there were no plans to stop the service. He explained that the Council had a legal duty to offer a Governors Support Service and added that it was a valued service and a key element in supporting national school standards.

The Member also questioned whether there was a proposal to transfer the service the Central South Consortium.

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning explained that the National Model for Regional Working in Education did include Governor Support Services in the regional model. However, he pointed out that whilst the function may transfer to the Consortium, the day to day operation of the service would continue to be delivered from Ty Trevithick on a hub basis and it was explained that there was inconsistency across the 5 authorities within the Consortium with regard to the level of their governor support service.

A Co-opted Member informed the Committee that as a parent governor, he had been asked to sit on one of the Consortium's new committee's which would be considering the role of governors. He explained that the terms of reference were still to be agreed but provided a brief overview of the work to be undertaken adding that he would be happy to provide regular feedback to the committee as the work progressed.

**RESOLVED:** to note the content of the report.

(Mrs) C Leyshon  
Chair

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm.

