

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 13th November, 2013 at 5pm.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

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

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mr A Minton – NASUWT & Teachers' Panel

Officers in Attendance:

Mr C Bradshaw – Director Education & Lifelong Learning
Ms E Thomas – Service Director, Schools and Community
Ms C Edwards – Head of Education, Finance
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation

28 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors M Adams, (Mrs) J Bunnage, A.L.Davies MBE, G Smith and Co-Opted Members (Mrs) C Jones, C Jones and Mr D Price.

29 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

30 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee of the 14th October, 2013.

31 UPDATE – JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Principal Solicitor, Litigation provided the Committee with an update on scrutiny of the Joint Education Service and advised that the Welsh Government were currently undertaking work on the revised governance arrangements for the Consortia, following consideration of the Hill review. The Officer concluded that in light of this work, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Education Committee set up to scrutinise the service was on hold until Welsh Government officials completed their work on the revised governance arrangements.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING.

32 RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S DRAFT WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-17.

The Service Director for Schools and Community provided Members with her report, which sought Members approval of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2014-17, which is to be submitted to the Welsh Government by 20th December, 2013.

The Service Director provided the committee with the background for the plan, which following the passing of the School Standard and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, now makes the plan a statutory requirement. Members were advised that the Local Authority have a duty to consult upon, produce and publish a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan that would be submitted for approval of, and monitoring by Welsh Ministers. The Officer explained that the plans are for a 3 year period with the expectation that they are reviewed by Local Authorities on an annual basis. It was commented that the Welsh Government considers the plans to be an essential tool in helping authorities improve their Welsh-medium education planning and provision.

The Service Director for Schools and Community referred Members to the draft plan, attached as an appendix to the report and advised that a well established strategic planning group which includes officers across service areas and other key stakeholders meets termly to monitor the actions and targets within the plan. The Service Director, reiterated that the plan was still in draft form and subject to change with updated information.

The Service Director, Schools and Community was queried as to how the demand for Welsh Education was gauged and encouraged with new parents and the Service Director advised of the linkage with the ChildCare Sufficiency Audit and Language Preference survey to establish the demand. The officer agreed that further awareness raising was needed in relation to access to Welsh Medium Education.

One Member commented on the perceived difficulties of recruiting good Head Teachers within Welsh Medium schools and officers were queried on how Head Teachers were encouraged to work within the County Borough. The Service Director, Schools and Community and the Director advised of the

proactive work undertaken within the Human Resources department to actively encourage welsh speaking staff from both English and Welsh Medium Schools and the success of the aspiring Headteachers programme, which provides teachers opportunity to up-skill.

The reason for pupils moving from Welsh Medium Education to the English medium was raised by one member, with it being queried whether this was due to perceived standards and it was further queried whether parents were actively engaged with to establish such reasons. The Service Director, advised that the data was being looked at through cluster groups, and commented that school choices were down to parent choice and that it was not for the Local Authority to delve into the reasons, although this was something that could be taken forward within the schools.

It was queried why the draft plan did not provide comparisons between English and Welsh Medium Education and the Service Director advised that the Welsh Government had prescribed the plan, therefore such comparisons were not a requirement, although it was added that this was something that could be done outside of the plan.

One Member, (Cllr P Jarman) referred to the Council's currently adopted 'Welsh Education Scheme 2012-15' and the documents reference to free home to school transport. The Member requested assurance that the documents stipulation that free transport would be provided both ways if part time attendance was at the behest of the school and / or Authority would be honoured. The Director, Education and Lifelong Learning commented that the proposed service cuts were still out to consultation.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED** :-

- a) to note the information contained within the report.
- b) Note and agree the County's Welsh in Education Strategic plan (WESP) 2014-17 (statutory from 2014) which contains proposals in how we will carry out education functions to:
 - Improve the planning and standards of welsh medium education in the area
 - Set targets for planning and improving standards
 - Report on the level of progress made
 - Assess the demand for Welsh-Medium Education

33 SELF EVALUATION OF SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICES IN EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF.

The Service Director for Schools and Community provided her report to the committee which provided Members with the outcome of an audit undertaken by the Local Authority on safeguarding arrangements in Education Services for Children and Young People in Rhondda Cynon Taf, through self evaluation. The Service Director commented that safeguarding underpins all policies and procedures within the Education service and confirmed this was a statutory duty under the Education Act 2002.

The Committee were advised that the arrangements that local authorities and schools have in place need to provide for two aspects to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and the Service Director proceeded to advise of the two aspects. The Officer also advised that to ensure that safeguarding and child protection practices within RCT were rigorous and robust the local authority had utilised the Estyn evaluation tool and referred Members to the self evaluation report contained as an appendix to the report.

The Service Director, Schools and Community concluded her report by advising that although many areas of good practice had been identified there were areas for improvement, although advised that some of these areas had already been addressed and that an Action Plan was to be drafted to ensure the remaining areas were addressed and monitored upon. The Service Director also commented that as monitoring of all safeguarding policies and procedures was an ongoing process a progress report could be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

One Member commented highly on the safeguarding controls evidenced within schools within the County Borough and the valuable service and support provided to children within the school environment.

The role of the Counselling service was commented upon, with Members querying the signposting of other support mechanisms for children and young people, away from face to face support. The Service Director, confirmed that prominent signposting of alternative support mechanisms were available within schools.

The procedure for professional allegation investigations was raised by one Member of the Committee, who questioned whether outside organisations were procured to assist, or whether the investigations were completed internally. The Service Director, Schools and Community confirmed that some investigations were referred to SERVOCA, for independent investigation whilst others were carried out internally through the Council's Human Resources department. The type of investigation conducted was unique to each case with the Authority choosing the most appropriate method at the time.

The newly revised DBS checks were highlight by Members and it was proposed by Members within the Committee that Governors within schools should also be subject to such checks and the Director, Education & Lifelong Learning agreed to refer the matter to the Director, Human Resources. One Member raised her disappointment that warning letter regarding pre-employment checks had been recently sent to 10 schools, following the stern warning letter circulated to all schools by the Director, Education & Lifelong Learning and the Director, Human Resources in respect of the same issue. The Director advised Members that a significant improvement had been noted in the area, and although the Authority was not unsympathetic to the needs of Schools in respect of staffing, safeguarding of children was the main priority.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report.

34 DINNER MONEY ARREARS

The Head of Education, Finance provided Members with the outcome of the internal audit report on the administration of free school meals, and subsequent action taken. Members were reminded that the item had been referred from the Council's Audit Committee due to the Committee's concerns regarding inconsistencies of practice.

The Head of Education, Finance provided the Committee with the background to the initial audit review and its opinion, whereby it was found that were a consistent approach was not established within some schools then significant arrears were identified. It was established that the debts were then not reported to Education finance, resulting in large amounts owing and no recovery action being taken. The officer continued by advising that a dinner money protocol was in place, although internal audit recommended that the protocol was to be revised to standardise follow up procedures and clarify the approach in invoicing/recharging school budgets and the agreed thresholds of debt that determine what course of action could be taken.

The Head of Education, finance proceeded to advise the Committee on the action taken to date in light of the audit recommendations and referred Members of the Committee to the revised protocol including standard letters contained within the report. The Officer confirmed that the revised protocol was introduced in September 2013 with every school clerk being invited to training sessions on the implementation. It was also confirmed that a review of the procedure would be undertaken at the end of November.

Members of the Committee queried the actions taken in regard to safeguarding of children in such circumstances and the Head of Education, Finance confirmed that referral mechanisms were in place to address any issues.

The Officer was queried on whether the debts accrued by siblings would be treated on a collective basis or whether pupils were treated individually and the Head of Education, finance confirmed that following implementation of the policy, and the noted experiences the policy would be amended, with the accrument of debts being on an individual basis.

Members of the Committee thanked internal audit for undertaking the review and to the Education Finance service for the work done to date to establish a consistent, workable method for collection of dinner money arrears, which included safeguarding provisions.

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

The meeting closed at 6 pm

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

