



EDUCATION, SKILLS AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.00 PM THURSDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2023

***MULTI-LOCATION MEETING - COUNCIL CHAMBER, PORT TALBOT
& MICROSOFT TEAMS***

All mobile telephones to be switched to silent for the duration of the meeting

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1. Chair's Announcements
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 14*)
 - 25th May 2023
 - 6th July 2023
4. Annual Report 2022 - 2023 (*Pages 15 - 28*)
5. Update on the roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals (*Pages 29 - 38*)
6. Pre-Decision Scrutiny
To select appropriate items from the Cabinet Board agenda for Pre-Decision Scrutiny (Cabinet Board reports included for Scrutiny Members)

7. Committee Action Log (*Pages 39 - 40*)
8. Forward Work Programme 2023/24 (*Pages 41 - 42*)
9. Urgent Items
Any urgent items at the discretion of the Chairperson pursuant to Section 100BA(6)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Friday, 22 September 2023

Committee Membership:

Chairperson: **Councillor R.Phillips**

Vice Chairperson: **Councillor D.Thomas**

Councillors: W.Carpenter, N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, C.Lewis,
R.Mizen, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds,
P.Rogers, D.Whitelock and R.W.Wood

***Co-opted** A. Amor, M.Caddick and L.Newman
Voting Members

***Co-opted Non** R.De Benedictis
Voting Members

Notes:

- (1) *If Committee Members or non-Committee Members wish to have relevant items put on the agenda for future meetings, then please notify the Chief Executive/Chair eight days before the meeting.*
- (2) *If non-Committee Members wish to attend for an item of interest, then prior notification needs to be given (by 12.00 noon on the day before the meeting). Non-Committee Members may speak but not vote, or move or second any motion.*

- (3) *For pre scrutiny arrangements, the Chair will normally recommend forthcoming executive items for discussion/challenge. It is also open to Committee Members to request items to be raised - though Members are asked to be selective here in regard to important issues.*
- (4) *The relevant Cabinet Board Members will also be invited to be present at the meeting for Scrutiny/ Consultation purposes.*
- (5) *Would the Scrutiny Committee Members please bring the Cabinet Board papers with them to the meeting.*

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Minutes of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

25 May 2023

Port Talbot Civic Centre / Remotely - Hybrid

Chairperson:	Councillor R.Phillips
Vice Chairperson:	Councillor D.Thomas
Councillors:	W.Carpenter, N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds and D.Whitelock
Co-opted Voting Members:	M.Caddick
Officers In Attendance	I.Guy, C.Millis, D.Holder-Phillips, H.Thomas, K.Thomas, R.Crowhurst, J.Burge, M.Daley, K.Windsor-Brown, D.Holder-Phillips, S McCluskie and A Thomas
Cabinet Invitees:	Councillors J.Hurley, N.Jenkins and C.Phillips

1. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 8 and 9 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meetings held on 16th March 2023 and 13th April 2023 were approved as true and accurate records.

4. **PUPIL ATTENDANCE UPDATE**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members queried the correlation between pupils free school meal status and attendance. Officers confirmed that pupils in receipt of free school meals had poorer attendance than pupils who did not receive free school meals. Members congratulated the team on the amount of work carried out in making the correlations and looked forward to the outcomes of the work.

Members enquired if Estyn had been contacted and what was their approach to absence. Officers commented that Estyn were concerned that our Covid attendance recovery rate has been slower than other local authorities. Conversations have been held with Estyn on a number of matters, including standards, attendance and safeguarding; Estyn will discuss attendance with individual schools on a school by school basis.

Members questioned if families were continuing to take holidays outside of term time due to financial pressures. Officers advised there has not been an increase in the number of holidays taken by individual families but there has been an increase in the amount of families taking holidays during term time. However, Officers noted that Neath Port Talbot do not fine parents for taking a single holiday if attendance is otherwise good.

The report is for information and is noted.

5. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

Seren Programme

The Officer gave an overview of the report as detailed in the circulated agenda.

Members noted it was pleasing to hear of the collaboration between Neath Port Talbot Group of Colleges but queried if there was also collaboration with Gower College and College Sir Gâr? Is there a breakdown of the background and type of backgrounds of students on the programme; is funding help available and what support is in place for the culture shock that pupils may experience? Officers confirmed that work is carried out collaboratively and Neath Port Talbot are part of the South Central Wales region which also includes Swansea, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. College Sir Gâr is part of the Carmarthenshire/Ceredigion/Pembrokeshire hub and Neath Port Talbot work with them to ensure students can access sessions where appropriate. In relation to finances, there is a close relationship with the Widening Participation Team. Alumni students provide support to students throughout the process. The Seren programme is a free of charge programme available to pupils from all backgrounds, close work is undertaken with schools to support pupils if additional support is needed.

Members asked for information on the flexibility of the programme. Officers advised that students were identified by teachers and it was pupil choice whether to take up a place in the programme. In years 8 and 9, pupils can take part in opportunities informally and join the Welsh Government programme formally in year 10. Teachers will work with pupils to identify any barriers to the pupil entering the programme

Following scrutiny, members noted the item for information.

Personal Transport Budget

Officers outlined the report that was circulated with the agenda.

Members commented on the level of flexibility the proposal would bring and the potential benefits to individuals and queried if there had been any discussion with Community Transport Operators? The Officer confirmed that currently we are unable to use charity run community transport groups however community operators could become involved if they followed the procurement process. This may be a topic for future discussion, and will be taken up with colleagues in Environment.

Members questioned whether any additional funding would be incorporated into the Home to School Transport Budget in relation to the forthcoming introduction of a 20mph speed limit, which is likely to

affect operating costs. The Officer confirmed that this has been identified as an additional risk to the Home to School Transport budget and is currently under careful monitoring. Operators are concerned but currently it is unclear how costs will be affected long term.

Members queried contingency arrangements should parents' circumstances change. Officers confirmed there was no availability in the system to plan for unexpected circumstances.

Members questioned whether Transport Workers could work with pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) to enable them to travel to school by school mini bus instead of taxis, this would upskill the pupil and save money long-term. Officers confirmed that an additional Transport Worker has been employed to specifically work with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the worker has already had an impact on pupils. The Travel Training Programme works with pupils with a Statement/Individual Development Plan to support them moving on to further education and as a life skill.

Members queried the long term effect in the reduction of firms available to provide services and commented that there was a risk that some pupils may still lose out. The Officer noted that following the pandemic the situation had been difficult but hoped the situation was now stabilising; colleagues in the Environment department liaise with operators with the aim of filling all contracts, this proposal will help to fill in any gaps. Other strategies included sharing routes and doubling up on taxis. There is an option to look at current fleet vehicles.

Members asked if feedback was available from other Local Authorities who have used personal travel budgets. Officers confirmed that this system has been used in England for a number of years and Monmouth, Newport and Rhondda Cynon Taf collaborated on a very similar scheme approximately four years ago, it is shown to be popular on difficult routes and with parents where usual home to school transport options don't work for them.

Members were enthusiastic about the prospect of potentially developing an in house fleet, but asked if any other work had been carried out to look at this issue holistically. The Officer confirmed this is always an option if the circumstances present.

The Officer confirmed Transport for Wales in conjunction with Welsh Government offer free passes for pupils to access public transport. The purpose of the Travel Training programme is to enable children to have independence, so this might involve walking, cycling or using public transport.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

Increased Planned Places - Permission to consult

The Officer gave a brief overview of the report.

Members queried whether the Blaenhonddan ASD provision proposal would still have come forward if the proposal for the Swansea Valley School had been agreed. The Officer confirmed that this proposal was in addition to any earlier proposal.

Members queried the term 'non-structural reconfiguration' as used in page 70 of the report. Officers confirmed this term was in reference to utilising space within the school but making no structural changes to the school.

Members questioned whether structural changes at Ysgol Maes Y Coed, would displace any other planned spend from the capital budget. Officers confirmed that no plans have been displaced by this spending. This provision is a priority. The capital budget can be used for refurbishments but of a manageable scale for items such as new toilets and roofs.

Members asked whether the proposed ASD unit at Blaenhonddan would be overseen by the Head of the existing special school or the Head of Blaenhonddan and whether the provision could be increased to help meet the current need. Officers clarified that the ASD unit would be part of the school and would be overseen by the Head of Blaenhonddan. The unit would be an open provision available to all children in the borough with an additional learning need who meet the criteria. Admissions would be made through the Local Authority Admission Panel. Officers confirmed that they are unable to increase the provision at Blaenhonddan and an additional 16 place provision will be planned for another site within the borough.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

6. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

Councillor R.Phillips

Chairperson

Minutes of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

6 July 2023

Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams

Vice Chairperson:	Councillor D.Thomas
Councillors:	N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, J.Jones, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, P.A.Rees and S.Renkes and R.Wood
Councillor Apologies:	R.Phillips, S.H.Reynolds and D. Whitelock
Co-opted Voting Members:	L.Newman
Co-opted Voting Members Apologies:	A.Amor, M Caddick
Officers In Attendance	I.Guy, H.Lervy, H.Lewis, C.Millis, Thomas, K.Jones, A.Spooner-Cleverly, P.Chivers, S.McCluskie and K.Windsor-Brown and P.Chivers
Cabinet Invitees:	Councillors J.Hurley, N.Jenkins and C.Phillips

1. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7 and 9 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None received.

3. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

Employability Hub in Aberavon Shopping Centre.

The Officer gave an overview of the report as detailed in the circulated Cabinet Board agenda pack.

Members supported the recommendation and commented that it was right to maintain a presence in the shopping centre where there was footfall. Members thanked officers and staff for their work in making the Hub a success but questioned whether there were plans to open a similar hub in Neath to serve Neath and Swansea Valley communities. Officers confirmed that the possibility of opening further hubs at Neath and Pontardawe libraries was being explored; if agreed, the hubs would replicate the services offered in the Port Talbot Hub.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

Quarter 4 Performance Indicators

Members acknowledged that absenteeism was not only a local issue but also a national one. The monitoring of school attendance is required as many pupils have missed a considerable amount of school due to the pandemic; this may have an impact on groups of pupils, particularly those who are currently studying for and taking examinations.

The Head of Service gave an overview of exclusions which has contributed to the attendance issues. Neath Port Talbot has a high level of exclusions with 677 pupils receiving a fixed term exclusion this academic year; missing approximately 3200 days of learning, this has added to the attendance issue. All schools are working to bring children back into school, but it was acknowledged that families also need support as family based activity is a contributing factor in non-attendance.

In relation to permanent exclusions, consultations are being undertaken regarding a proposal to form an All Wales Panel; this expert panel would discuss whether a child can return to school following multiple permanent exclusions. There are positive and negative consequences to this proposal, it would ensure an all Wales

approach but there would be additional pressures on governing bodies. More information will be provided when it is available.

The Head of Service stated that there was a link between exclusions and attendance; in Neath Port Talbot, 277 pupils have been excluded three or four times. To address this, there are plans for teams of officers to attend secondary schools in September to meet with at least 10 children whose attendance is 80% or less, from every school. Officers from Educational Psychology, School Based Counselling Service and Education Welfare Service will work with pupils and support them with any issues which may contribute to their non-attendance. This approach has been reported to and is supported by NAASH. It is hoped that as the officers will be independent of the school community, they will be able to work with children to support them and learn lessons on what Neath Port Talbot may be able to do differently. The outcome of this work will be brought back to this committee.

There is a huge amount of work going on behind the scene in Neath Port Talbot to improve attendance, however, there is not a one size fits all solution and it will take time before improvements are seen. It was acknowledged that pupils from year nine have been adversely affected due to the period of school that they missed during the pandemic. The Head of Service mentioned many forthcoming areas of change such as; examination changes, the roll out of the new curriculum for Wales, Additional Learning Needs reform and the ability to recruit high quality staff and noted that in addition to these changes the family behind the child needs help, not just the child.

Following scrutiny, members noted the item for information.

4. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

This item was noted.

5. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items

- 4 -

Councillor

Chairperson

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
28th September 2023

Report of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Chairperson

Matter Information

Wards Affected:

1. All Wards.

Annual Report of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 2022/23

Purpose of the Report:

2. To update members on the work undertaken by the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee for the civic year 2022/2023 and to note and commend the report to Council.

Background:

3. To provide an overview of the work of the committee for 2022/2023.

Financial Impacts:

4. No Impact.

Integrated Impact Assessment

5. There is no requirement at this stage to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information only.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

6. No impacts.

Workforce Impacts

7. No impacts.

Legal Impacts

8. No legal impacts.

Risk Management Impacts:

9. No impacts.

Consultation

10. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

11. That the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee note and endorse the Annual Report 2022/2023 attached at Appendix 1 and commend to Council.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

12. To note and endorse the Annual Report 2022/2023 of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Implementation of Decision

13. Immediate.

Appendices

14. Appendix 1 - 2022/2023 Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Annual Report
15. Appendix 2 – Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee summary of items considered

List of Background Papers

16. None.

Officer Contact

17. Cllr Rebeca Phillips - Chair of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

cll.r.phillips@npt.gov.uk

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2022/2023

**‘Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny
Committee’s Annual Report’**

1. Chair's Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present the Annual Report for the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee May 2022 – April 2023.

It has been an honour to chair the committee during this period and I would like to thank all Members and Officers for their work and contributions over the past 12 months.

This report reflects the important topics we have been considering as a committee and the importance of scrutiny to ensure the correct decisions are made for the residents of the borough.

We continue to see the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on our society, especially in terms of mental health and we are always very conscious of this issue when considering reports. The rising cost of living is also going to be an ongoing challenge for our residents, learners, and young people.

I believe the committee has undertaken its role effectively over the past 12 months and we have made some very difficult decisions. It will be vital that we continue to thoroughly scrutinise all aspects of the committee's remit going forward to ensure our services are working for our residents.

Looking ahead, our Forward Work Programme will provide some structure in terms of our meetings, but members will also be able to add items onto the agenda when required. The committee will continue to work hard on behalf of all residents of the borough and I am looking forward to tackling the challenges ahead.

Councillor R. Phillips, Chairperson

Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

2. Introduction to Scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny suggests that there are four key principles to effective Scrutiny and they are:

1. provides ‘critical friend’ challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers
2. enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
3. is carried out by ‘independent minded governors’ who lead and own the Scrutiny process
4. drives improvement in public services

Scrutiny is an integral part of the Council’s political structure and in many ways it plays a key role in assisting the Cabinet. Scrutiny Committees in the Council have met regularly through the year and have considered a wide range of issues. A number of the Scrutiny Committees have undertaken some in depth work as part of their forward work programmes, and this is highlighted within this document.

The Scrutiny Committees within the Council are:

- Cabinet
 - Policy & Resources Sub
- Education, Skills and Wellbeing
- Social Services, Housing and Community Safety
- Environment, Regeneration & Streetscene Services

Each of the Committees includes a mix of non-Executive Councillors that is politically balanced to reflect the political balance of the Council. The Chairs and Vice Chairs plus the Committee Membership are decided annually by Full Council. Each Committee meets at least 8 times during a Civic Year.

3. Purpose of Annual Report

3.1 The main aim of this report is to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 2022-2023.

3.2 The document may also facilitate discussions on additional items that could be included within the work programme for 2023/2024.

4. Overview of the work of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 2022/2023.

4.1 Number of Meetings

The Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee met on 7 occasions during 2022/2023.

4.2 The Work Programme 2022/2023.

Generally the agendas for the scrutiny meetings have been consistent with those outlined in the forward work programme. The Committee agree its Scrutiny work programme during their Forward Work Programme Workshop held on 8th September 2022.

It is acknowledged that the workshop session took place later than planned due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the subsequent cancellation of all meetings during the official mourning period.

When developing the work programme it was essential to give consideration to the key plans and strategies of the Council. The work programme also includes the results of any external inspections that had been undertaken within a specific service area or on a corporate level.

The review of the work of the Committee is included in the following pages has been structured to reflect the key roles of the Committee: Pre-Decision Scrutiny (which included policy development and review) and any items they wished to look at as part of their remit (usually for information purposes)

5. Key Issues considered during 2022/2023.

Throughout the civic year the Committee is consulted on a number of areas that require decision. These range from routine general issues to the larger

more complex decisions. Cabinet Board Members are in attendance during discussions and any views of the Committee are taken on board prior to making a decision.

The Scrutiny Committee also undertakes the performance monitoring role by considering a wide range of reports. Members challenge the information that is included which enables them to understand the issues facing the service. These reports are monitored on a quarterly basis.

As well as scrutinising key decisions, the Committee identifies topics within their remit in which they wish to look at in more detail. These items are usually for information purposes e.g. updating Members on specific projects of work.

The Council is well placed to demonstrate the improvements it has made to the scrutiny function and it is essential that we continue to build on these developments and I look forward to the next year as we take forward the priorities of the Council.

- Issues considered

May 2022 – April 2023

As detailed in the table attached at Appendix 1.

6. Joint Committees

During the year, the Committee worked jointly with the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the Strategic School Improvement Programme. Whilst it was recognised that the item fell within the remit of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board, the item was determined by Cabinet due to the significant impact on the Council in terms of its development of 21st Century Schools and the associated impact on the community. Therefore, a joint meeting of the Cabinet and Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee was held to scrutinise the item.

The item was scrutinised in detail at the Joint Meeting held on 19th April 2023. Following scrutiny, the recommendations outlined in the report were not supported to Cabinet.

7. Scrutiny Contact Information

The Scrutiny Team are located in the Chief Executive's Legal and Democratic Services section and their contact details follows:

Name	Position	Contact Details
Alison Thomas	Senior Scrutiny Officer and Project Management Officer	E-mail a.thomas6@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763300
Pamela Chivers	Scrutiny Officer	E-mail: p.chivers@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763764
Tom Rees	Scrutiny Officer	E-mail: t.rees1@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763922

Alternatively if you think Scrutiny should consider a certain area or issue as part of their work programme then please e-mail democratic.services@npt.gov.uk

Appendix 2				
Committee Name:	Education, Skills & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee			
Number of Meetings held during the Council Year:	7			
Date of Meeting	Issues Considered	Information/Monitoring/Decision	Amendments	Task and Finish Group Created
27th September 2022	Disposal of Land at Neath Leisure Centre	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Play Sufficiency Assessment	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
27th October 2022	Participation and Engagement Strategy (Permission to Consult)	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2020-21	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Youth Service Update	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
24th November 2022	Band C Schools	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Cefn Coed Appraisal Report	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Creation of a Regional Partnership for Sport and Physical Activity in West Wales	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
8th December 2022	COVID-19 Update (Verbal)	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A

	Quarter 2 Performance Indicators	Monitoring - scrutiny Members noted the report	None`	N/A
	Education Safeguarding	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Pupil Attendance	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
25th January 2023	Consultation on 2023/24 Budget Proposals	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Post Covid Update	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Participation and Engagement Strategy	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	The agreed Syllabs for Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) in Neath Port Talbot Schools	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	School improvement Team - Support Visits	Monitoring - scrutiny Members noted the report	None	N/A
	Employability and Skills Update	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Margam Castle Cadw Grant Funding	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Leisure Services Update Report	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	the agreed Syllabs for Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) in Neath Port Talbot Schools	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
16th March 2023	The cost of living crisis - support offered by schools	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Admissions to Schools (Results of Consultation)	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Quarter 3 Performance Indicators	Monitoring - scrutiny Members noted the report	None	N/A

	Free School Meal Updates	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Professional Learning	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Urdd National Eisteddfod 2025	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
	Leadership arrangements - Celtic Leisure	Decision - recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board	None	N/A
13th April 2023	Elective Home Education	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Equality and Safe Place to Learn	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	Period Dignity Report	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A
	NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) Update Report	Information - committee noted the report	None	N/A

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board

28th September 2023

REPORT OF HEAD OF EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION RHIANNON CROWHURST

MATTER FOR INFORMATION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

UPDATE ON THE ROLLOUT OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Purpose of report

1. To provide information on the further progress to date of the implementation of the universal primary free school meal (UPFSM) rollout in Neath Port Talbot.

Executive summary

2. In July 2022 Welsh Government announced its intention that all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by September 2024.
3. In Neath Port Talbot, catering staff have worked extremely hard, in collaboration with the primary and special school leaders, to ensure that the rollout has been as prompt as possible, resulting in learners being able to access UPFSM well ahead of the proposed schedule.
4. Neath Port Talbot Catering Services offered all reception age pupils UPFSM at the start of the autumn term, 5th September 2022 and were 1 of 8 Authorities in Wales to implement the rollout of UPFSM to all Foundation Phase pupils in the autumn term, rolling out to Year 1 and Year 2 on 7th November 2022.
5. As the roll out proved to be successfully implemented, Neath Port Talbot catering staff progressed the roll out further, with year 3 and 4

pupils accessing the offer following the Easter holidays this year on 17th April 2023,

6. From September 4th 2023 the offer was extended to pupils in Years 5 and 6. Neath Port Talbot are now rolling out Universal Free School Meals to all Primary School Pupils.

Background

7. In July 2022 Welsh Government announced its intention that all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by 2024. This commitment was in response to the rising cost-of-living pressures on families and the government's ambitions of tackling child poverty and ensuring no child goes hungry in school. The Welsh Government has stated it is committed to implementing the scheme as quickly as possible.
8. The Welsh Government recognise that there are also wider benefits of free school meals, including promoting healthy eating across the school, increasing the variety of food learners can eat, improving social skills at mealtimes, as well as improving behaviour and attainment.
9. The policy is part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, which will see free school meals extended to all primary school pupils over the next three years.
10. The proposed Welsh Government timetable is as follows
 - September 2022 - learners offered universal free school meals in reception
 - April 2023 - learners offered free school meals in reception, year 1 and year 2
 - Schools that are able to deliver free school meals to learners in years 1 and 2 (in addition to reception) can do so from September 2022
11. The scheme is funded at a rate of £2.90 per pupil; this fully covers the cost of producing a school meal. With the recent increase in food prices and staff salaries WG are reviewing this unit rate to ensure it is still sufficient.

12. In addition, funding has been provided for both the preparation of the scheme rollout and capital works to ensure kitchens are equipped and capable of producing the required level of meals.

Implementing the roll out

13. During the summer 2022 Neath Port Talbot catering staff worked to ensure that this scheme became a possibility. Early engagement was established with local stakeholders, including pupils, families and delivery partners to better understand behaviours that could impact on the delivery of an offer of a free school meal and the level of take up.

14. Actions included -

- Undertaking an exercise to look at the uptake of meals (2019/2020 pre Covid) and pupil numbers on roll. Looked at each school's free school meal and paying uptake to forecast the number of potential additional meals.
- Liaised with head teachers individually to discuss the impact on the school day/duration of the lunchtime service/lunchtime supervision/curriculum/hall availability as some schools had reduced their lunchtime.
- Liaised with food suppliers to establish if they would be able to deliver additional food volume. Reviewed the food chain/ supply, their structure and staff availability. Identified the possibility of additional delivery days and cost implications.
- Established availability of foods for specialist diets and sourced. Undertook additional requests for special diets tailor made to pupils
- Arranged face to face cooks meetings informing cooks of the changes and the rollout schedule.
- Reviewed the menu in line with the Current Welsh Government Regulations and or any future changes. Nutritionally analysed the menu for the Certificate of Compliance.
- Liaised with suppliers of kitchen equipment and light equipment and uniform to secure supply and ordered additional equipment and uniforms.

15. Additionally the catering manager carried out audits of school infrastructure (including kitchen and dining facilities) workforce and contractual arrangements to better understand the existing capacity

and identify where there would be need for future development/investment. This involved -

- Looking at the kitchen infrastructure across the 60 sites and analysing current meal uptake and potential uptake. Carried out site visits.
- Set up a project working group with all partners and internal partners.
- Expedited two schemes already identified for new build and refurbishment - Coedffranc Primary School and Baglan Primary School – which would be critical to the delivery of the service and increased uptake.
- Looked at the potential of a kitchen at Central Primary School, Foundation Phase site, as they currently transport a meal in from Baglan Kitchen.
- Requested all maintenance reports from the maintenance contractor, currently Lorne Stewart, so an up to date inventory of all the kitchen equipment, serial and model numbers was received and produced an AMS inventory as a base for planning.
- Engaged and met with our mechanical and electrical team to ascertain electrical capacity at each kitchen and set up a project group.
- Completed an Inventory of Dining Furniture and identified further requirements for full capacity in the dining halls.
- Established where any facility is unable to produce the increase in meals and looked at alternative solutions - regen ovens, kitchen pods, extensions, new builds, refurbishments and service provision.
- Looked at the staffing rationale of all lunch time staff 200 + and engaged with staff to inform them of any changes.
- Reviewed risk assessments in line with current Covid restrictions/guidelines.
- Provided the mandatory training for newly recruited catering staff.
- Looked at posts in relation to numbers cooking and carried out an exercise to identify if additional staff/staffing hours were required.
- Engaged with stakeholders and HR to ensure the increase in staffing requirements would be met to run the service efficiently.
- Liaised with HR on additional workload due to the safe recruitment of staff and HR processes involved.

- Advertised posts, interviewed and appointed in line with the Safe Recruitment Policy and Procedure.
 - Looked at Inventories of kitchen light equipment and supplied additional items that were required which included saucepans, trays, plates, bowls, beakers, and cutlery.
 - Liaised with our internal Trade Waste Services to identify any additional pickups in relation to waste food. Ordered any additional bins and caddies that were required.
16. In line with Welsh Governments announcement, Neath Port Talbot started providing free school meals to all reception aged children in September 2022. Initially take up was slightly lower than anticipated, however this soon increased.
17. Prior to UPFSM the daily average meals July 2022 were 4469. With the introduction of reception UPFSM Sept meals increased to 4953.
18. The rollout of all Year groups has resulted in a daily average of over 7,235 primary school pupil meals being served. This is expected to increase as the term progresses.

Financial Impacts

19. Revenue grant Funding allocation for 2023/24 of £2,597,132 has been allocated to Neath Port Talbot, with monthly claims being submitted to WG in arrears for meals provided.
20. Additionally we have received a capital grant of £1,554,885 intended for work to kitchens, additional equipment etc. The intended purpose of the grant funding is to ensure that all primary children have access to free healthy and nutritious meals at school.
21. Welsh Government are currently reviewing the rate received per meal to ensure the funding is sufficient due to increases in both food costs and staff wages. The agreed rate of £2.90 per meal previously provided us with a surplus over costs, but the increases in food costs and staff wages will now mean that we will cover our costs; any further increases will require additional funding from WG, however there is no immediate cause for concern to our budget at present.

Capital Works

22. As the programme has been gradually rolled out across the primary schools it has become apparent that some school kitchens do not have the necessary equipment or space available to be able to cater for a significantly greater number of children now eligible to receive free school meals. As a result, a number of small and larger scale schemes for kitchen replacement, remodelling and refurbishment have been identified and are planned for within the schools capital maintenance programme.
23. To date work has been carried out to refurbish kitchens including upgrading electrics, new equipment, additional storage etc.
24. Purchase of heavy equipment including ovens, refrigerators, freezers, electric hot plates, mobile serving counters, food preparation tables, trollies. Installation of these products and input and/or adaption/upgrade of electricity supplies/additional electrical sockets has also taken place.
25. The refurbishment of Baglan Primary kitchen new build is currently underway, with a completion date of 17th November 2023. Coedffranc Primary new kitchen build is expected to go out to tender in October 2023.
26. Upgrades to cooking capacity undertaken in the Summer holidays included Alderman Davies Church in Wales School, Cwmafan Primary School, and YGG Rhosafan, with a part refurbishment scheme at Glyncorrwg Primary School.

Integrated Impact Assessment

27. There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment as this report is for information purposes only.

Valley Communities Impacts

28. There is no specific impact on valley communities as result of this report.

Workforce impacts

29. There has been a positive impact on the workforce as a result of the UPFSM rollout, as more staff have been required to enable the programme to be carried out successfully.
30. To date 55 additional staff have been recruited and 79 staff have had an increase to their weekly hours.
31. As meal numbers increase in coming months we will be recruiting additional staff and awarding current staff with additional hours assessed on the needs of the service.

Legal impacts

32. There are no direct legal impacts associated with this report.
33. The Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009 requires local authorities and governing bodies to take action to promote healthy eating and drinking by pupils in maintained schools. Within the Measure is the requirement that local authorities and governing bodies that provide school meals or milk to encourage take-up, and take reasonable steps to ensure every pupil entitled to receive school meals and milk free of charge does receive them.

Risk management

34. There are a number of risks associated with the UPFSM rollout. These include –
 - Withdrawal of funding
 - Staff recruitment and retention
 - Noncompliance of regulations in kitchens
 - Food supplies to comply with regulations
 - Parent/Guardian expectations
 - Capacity to manage and deliver construction projects
35. Recruitment and retention is a particular risk in the current climate, as there have been significant difficulties in recruiting new staff. A number of steps have been taken to try and improve recruitment and mitigate the risk, including
 - Attending job fairs

- Visiting local catering college
- Letterbox drop
- Social media campaign
- Regular information on Council webpage
- School text messaging service
- Weekly staff letter identifying areas where we have difficulty recruiting.
- Job centre advertising.
- School vacancy bulletins

36. Meeting the appropriate regulations around food and kitchens is a constant risk, however the following actions are regularly undertaken

- AMS train and induct all new staff and refresh all catering staff in line with Food Safety Regulations.
- Cooks meetings and regular engagement.
- Safe Catering Documentation.
- HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control points) documentation is completed daily.
- Risk Assessments.
- Risk perception training
- COSHH (control of substances hazardous for health) assessments.
- Cooks undertake allergen training. Individual menus are compiled for the pupil in conjunction with parents/carers and care plans.
- Only approved food suppliers are used.
- Yearly kitchen equipment maintenance.
- Gas testing.
- Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) and electrical testing.
- Yearly maintenance of dining furniture.
- Bi annual deep cleaning of all kitchens.
- Segregated kitchen areas and equipment for the preparation of allergen meals.
- Separate preparation area and equipment for raw food to prevent cross contamination.
- Continual supervision and monitoring and Inspections by management.
- Visits and inspections from Environmental Health Officers and Trading Standard officers.

37. The catering manager and her team continue to work with schools and parents/guardians to ensure that there is clear communication and that any queries or concerns are swiftly dealt with. This helps to

manage expectations and ultimately provides a better service for schools and pupils.

38. The additional construction work required for some of the larger projects is already presenting challenges due to difficulties in workforce supply, and delays or shortages of building materials. This creates a risk to the council of potentially not being able to spend grant funding within the required timeframe, and is a common concern across all local authorities at this time. The capacity for managing larger projects is also a risk to the roll out.

39. The programme would not be possible without Welsh Government funding; currently there is no indication that this will not be continued at least for the immediate future.

Consultation

40. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

41. It is recommended that members note the content of the report on the roll out of the UPFSM programme.

Implementation of the decision

N/A

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Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee - Actions and Referrals Update – 2023-24

<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Minuted Action / Referral / Request</u>	<u>Progress Update</u>	<u>Officer</u>	<u>Target / Completion Date</u>	<u>Completed / On-going</u>
Page 39						

Agenda Item 7

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Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

(All starting 2pm unless otherwise stated)

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Contact Officer
2023		
28 th September	Annual Report 2022 - 2023	Chair of Education Skills & Wellbeing Scrutiny Pamela Chivers (Scrutiny Officer)
	Update on the roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals	Rhiannon Crowhurst
23 rd November	Personal Travel Budget Update – Home to School Transport	Rhiannon Crowhurst
2024		
1 st February	New Curriculum – update	Chris Millis
	Impact of energy prices on School budgets	Rhiannon Crowhurst/Julie Merryfield
	Geographical spread of provision for Lifelong Learning	Chris Millis
14 th March	CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) update on criteria to access service and new ALN Framework	Hayley Lervy
25 th April	Training arrangements for school based staff	Chris Millis

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