

Minutes of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

1 February 2024

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

Chairperson:	Councillor R.Phillips
Councillors:	W.Carpenter, N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds and R.W.Wood
Co-opted Voting Members:	A. Amor, M.Caddick and L.Newman
Officers In Attendance	I.Guy, C.Millis, R.Crowhurst, C.Saunders, M.Daley, D.Holder-Phillips, S.McCluskie, Pain, A.Spooner-Cleverly, R.Samuel, J Davies, P.Williams 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, 9 and 13 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Adam Amor – Item 8 – Personal, Non-Prejudicial. Director of business who carries out occasional work for the Youth Service.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **CURRICULUM FOR WALES UPDATE**

Members asked if data was held regarding progress made by schools in implementing the new Curriculum for Wales and enquired if any schools have fallen behind.

Officers confirmed that all the schools with pupils up to year 8 are planning and implementing the curriculum for Wales with all children moving towards the four purposes. The measure of progress is different to how progress was measured previously. Schools are developing a shared understanding as to what progress may look like and are implementing design within the framework of the curriculum.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report.

5. **IMPACT OF ENERGY PRICES ON SCHOOL BUDGETS**

Members referred to page 15 of the report, and questioned the timescale regarding the potential capability for solar PV panels to be installed at 14 schools. Members also queried potential costs involved, how many additional posts were required and how the installation and additional posts would be funded.

The Head of Support Services and Transformation confirmed that at present, a desktop survey has been carried out, with potential schools being identified due to their location and style of roof. The work is being undertaken by the Environment Directorate and an update will be requested and progress will be reported back to this committee.

A Co-opted member noted the mitigating actions mentioned in the report but questioned if meters and daily standing charges could be looked at further. Schools with split sites will have multiple meter boxes with multiple standing charges.

The Head of Support Services and Transformation will seek clarity on this issue from colleagues in the Environment Directorate and report back findings to this committee.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report.

6. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

Standing Advisory Panel

Members referred to Appendix 1 of the report and queried the procedure for recruitment to the committee, in particular recruitment of an atheist representative.

Officers confirmed that recruitment procedures can vary by Standing Advisory Councils (SAC). The aim is to achieve a broad range of representation from all faiths and beliefs relevant to the county. Head offices of relevant organisations are contacted to request a true and balanced representative. Once an individual is identified, discussions are held at SAC and a group decision is made on the individuals' suitability, relevance and appropriateness. Recruitment of an atheist representative can be more challenging but is required to comply with Welsh Government Equality Legislation. Reputable atheist organisations and groups are contacted to put forward a representative and vetting is carried out.

Following scrutiny, the committee supported the recommendation to Cabinet Board.

Youth Service Update

Members asked if the service still experienced difficulties in recruiting qualified youth workers particularly for the sessional work activities. Members referred to page 20 of the report and enquired on the level of participation at the first Welsh medium youth club in Trebannws.

Officers confirmed that the progress of the Welsh medium youth club at Trebannws was positive. There have been 173 contacts within Trebannws and club membership stands at 29 boys and 16 girls. Officers confirmed that there are always difficulties in recruiting staff but the situation was currently on track with two youth clubs re-opening.

The Head of Education Development noted that Neath Port Talbot was in a more positive position than some other local authorities as staff chose to work here due to the high standards. It was noted that recruitment may continue to be an issue due to the nature of the job and this is a national issue. The previous two recruitment waves were successful and clubs have re-opened due to the re-engagement of people taking up part time posts. Nationally, the expectation of high level qualifications of sessional staff is difficult to achieve.

The Chair welcomed the Welsh-medium youth club in Trebannws and noted the difference it has made to the community and extended thanks to all staff. The Chair questioned if there are any plans for further Welsh-medium youth groups in the county.

Officers confirmed that the last club opened was externally funded, extra funding and staff would be required to enable further clubs to be opened. It was noted that work is ongoing in relation to general Welsh development with a celebratory event being held last year and a visit for Welsh speaking young people to Llangranog, but extra funding is needed longer term.

The Head of Education Development confirmed that the youth service had engaged with Bronwen Lewis who is supporting musical development in the Welsh Language.

Members enquired whether there were any bilingual clubs in the county.

Officers confirmed that in relation to the Glynneath youth club, staff provide one Welsh-medium session/awareness raising event per month, this can include games and quizzes about Welsh heritage and culture. Welsh speaking young people in the group provide assistance with the sessions which is empowering for the young people.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

Transport Personal Travel Budget Update

The Head of Support Services and Transformation advised members that this was an update report following the report brought to Cabinet

Board in May 2023 seeking permission to implement the personal travel budget.

Members commented that some questions had been raised with the service in advance of the meeting, confirmation was given that users were selected for the personal travel budget where no alternative travel routes are available and to eliminate single occupancy travel. Members questioned what procedure was followed if no alternative travel route was available but families didn't want a personal travel budget.

The Head of Service confirmed that the authority has a duty to ensure the most cost effective means of travel is provided, taking into account the needs of the child and family. If no alternative travel routes are available, parents will be offered the personal travel budget, and assistance will be provided on how the budget can be used, in case of difficulties, officers work with families to identify solutions. It was noted that the personal travel budget is a flexible arrangement which works for the majority of families.

Members asked if any child had experienced difficulty in getting to school which affected their attendance.

The Head of Service confirmed that the biggest workload for the service is from families who are not eligible for travel assistance, rather than difficulties with the personal travel budget.

The Education Transport Manager advised members that parents can request a formal review of the suitability of the travel offer received in the form of an appeal.

Members questioned how many families have received a personal transport budget.

The Head of Service confirmed that at the time of the report, 51 families had received a personal travel budget, where otherwise pupils would be transported in a single occupancy taxi as no other alternative was available. Work is ongoing and there are a further 17 pupils currently using a single occupancy taxi where it may be suitable to transfer to a personal travel budget.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

7. **COMMITTEE ACTION LOG**

The committee action log was noted.

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

In relation to the Pupil Attendance update report scheduled for 14th March, members requested a thematic Estyn inspection report could be circulated.

The Head of Education Development confirmed the Estyn report would be attached as an appendix to the report.

The forward work programme was noted.

9. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

10. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

Resolved: to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

11. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF PRIVATE ITEM(S)**

Royal National Lifeboat Institute

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendation with the addition 'that cover is extended to 8.00pm in the evenings to ensure safety into the twilight hours.'

**Councillor R.Phillips
Chairperson**