

Minutes of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

5 December 2024

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

Vice Chairperson:	Councillor D.Thomas
Councillors:	N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, D.Keogh, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, S.Rahaman, P.A.Rees, S.H.Reynolds, P.Rogers and B.Woolford
Co-opted Voting Members:	A. Amor and M.Caddick
Officers In Attendance	H.Lervy, C.Millis, R.Crowhurst, C.Saunders, C.Morris, L.Clement-Jones, L.McAndrew, M.Daley, K.Windsor-Brown, A.Spooner-Cleverly, S.Griffiths, D.Evans, R.Monks, L.Williams and P.Chivers
Cabinet Invitees:	Councillors J.Hurley, N.Jenkins and C.Phillips

1. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr. Nia Jenkins, Item (5A) – Personal, Governor at Alltwen Primary School

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2024 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. **TO CONSIDER ITEMS FROM THE CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

(a) **Curriculum for Wales**

The Head of Education Development provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack; Neath Port Talbot is making steady progress, but the curriculum change will involve long term cultural changes. The new Curriculum has been rolled out to school years 7, 8 & 9 in 2024. The roll out of the new curriculum is more challenging for secondary schools due to the pressures of qualifications.

Members enquired about the level of support provided to schools in relation to the new curriculum.

Officers confirmed that Neath Port Talbot had progressed further with the curriculum in comparison with other local authorities in Wales. Bespoke support was provided to schools in line with the level of need required at individual schools and professional learning offers were available for all schools.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

(b) **School Improvement Team - Leadership Strategy**

The Head of Education Development provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack. It was noted that although the authority has strong support for leadership development, changes to the senior leadership profile has resulted in an increase in less experienced headteachers and deputy headteachers. A new leadership strategy was implemented in September 2017.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

(c) **School Improvement Team - Teaching and Learning**

The Head of Education Development provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack. The challenges faced by school leaders in improving and evolving teaching in line with the expectations of Curriculum for Wales was recognised. The process of learning rather than the final product of learning is at the heart of the new curriculum, and this provides significant challenges.

Officers advised members that there had been positive engagement and schools were starting to work closer together.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

(d) **Country Parks Car Park Review**

The Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture provided members with an overview of the report as contained within the agenda pack.

Members questioned the differing prices of the current annual passes at Margam Country Park and Gnoll Country Park. Members enquired whether a sliding scale for car park charges had been considered; this may increase resident use for shorter time periods.

Members enquired whether consideration had been given to Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) enforcement.

Officers confirmed that different enforcement options had been considered but there were high costs associated with some methods. Barrier parking was not considered suitable due to potential mechanical failures which had been experienced by facilities in neighbouring authorities and the proximity to the A48 at Margam, requiring a steady flow of traffic.

Members enquired whether there would be a facility to pay at the country parks rather than by online payment as this option was not suitable for all visitors.

Officers confirmed that a facility to pay at the kiosk at Margam Country Park would still be available and visitors would also be able

to pay over the telephone in addition to the Pay and Display machines.

Members raised concern that public buses did not stop at the Visitor Centre at Gnoll Country Park and this was discouraging members of the public who wished to travel to the park by public transport.

The Head of Leisure, Tourism Heritage and Culture advised members that entry to country parks was free; the charge related to car parking only. The bus stop at Gnoll Park has been reviewed but there have been issues in providing a bus stop near to the visitor centre. Further details will be circulated to members.

Members agreed that the proposed Annual All Park Pass was value for money but questioned whether the initial outlay would be prohibitive to some people.

The Head of Service confirmed that the proposal included a direct debit facility at a cost of £7.50 per month, which was more affordable and represented value for money.

Members noted that the number of season ticket holders at Gnoll Park was low and enquired what marketing was being considered to promote the country parks. Members enquired whether a newsletter had been considered to promote the country parks and whether season tickets could be marketed as gift options.

Officers acknowledged that marketing could be improved and advised members that a Marketing Officer was now in place to take this forward. Currently, due to the facility renovations at Gnoll Country Park, season tickets were not actively being promoted.

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendation outlined in the draft Cabinet report.

(e) **Flying Start Expansion Phase 3**

The Head of Early Years, Inclusion and Partnerships provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years congratulated staff on the work undertaken in the previous Flying Start phases.

Members questioned whether funding was available to implement phase 3 in a quicker timescale than the 6 years stated in the report. There were concerns over children who were in immediate need of support.

Officers advised members that it was important to ensure that the appropriate childcare infrastructure was in place prior to moving forward. The Childcare Sufficiency assessment was important in identifying need.

Members acknowledged the difficulties currently experienced in the child care sector in terms of training and rising costs.

Officers advised members that work is ongoing to raise the bar of the childcare workforce at all levels and to ensure that the childcare workforce are recognised as professionals with appropriate pay to match their qualifications. The issues currently experienced are raised with Welsh Government and it is hoped that there will be ongoing support for the sector.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years, mentioned the recent Childcare Awards presentation and commented that 47 of the 49 of the mostly private companies attending, offered Flying Start. The additional work and training undertaken to offer Flying Start is not recognised. Any additional funding provided to this area would be welcomed.

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendation outlined in the draft Cabinet report.

(f) **Corporate Plan Annual Report 2023/2024**

This item was inadvertently omitted from the meeting. The information was circulated to committee members by e-mail.

5. **TO CONSIDER ITEMS FROM THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered items from the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

(a) **Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme Update**

The Head of Support Services and Transformation provided members with an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Members requested further details regarding the Schools Strategic Improvement Programme and requested a workshop be arranged to inform committee members of the ongoing plans.

The Head of Support Services and Transformation advised members that all current plans were at different stages, however, a workshop could be arranged to inform scrutiny committee members. The Scrutiny Officer to arrange with officers outside of the meeting.

Members requested an update on the facilities at Alltwen Primary School.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years confirmed that repair works were planned, and these would be undertaken during school closure periods.

It was confirmed that members of the School Standards Partnership Group would be invited to visit a whole through school.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

(b) **Employability and Skills Strategy**

The Head of Support Services and Transformation provided members with an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack. Work commenced on the strategy in 2022 however, a number of significant ongoing changes across Neath Port Talbot indicated that the draft strategy wasn't providing a clear and concise plan to support and provide employment opportunities. Work to revise the draft plan will take place in 2025.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

6. **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Members considered performance monitoring items.

(a) **Corporate Plan Six Monthly Update for Quarter 1 and 2**

Officers advised members that there was a duty to report on the progress of the Corporate Plan. The current Corporate Plan for 2024 – 2027 was approved by council in July 2024, following the half-yearly report before members today, progress will be reported quarterly going forward. Further work is required in relation to the recording of on track/off track performance measures for monitoring purposes.

Members referred to page 226 of the report and the Home to School transport measure which was off track. Members have already discussed this with officers and there is awareness of some of the issues; Members enquired whether a further update was available.

The Head of Education Development confirmed that a report on this matter will come to scrutiny but further details are not known at this time.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

7. **SELECTION OF ITEMS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY**

Officers advised members of new items that had been added to the Cabinet Forward Work

Programme and changes to the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme; members were given the opportunity to request further items for consideration.

Members requested the following reports be added to the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme:

- Accessibility Strategy
- Community Focused Schools
- Support Visits by Education Support Officers in Schools
- Elective Home Education

The Safeguarding Support Within Schools report and the Library Strategy report were previously scheduled for scrutiny in January; in agreement with the Committee, these have been moved to the 6th March meeting.

The Welsh Public Library Standards report was added to the Forward Work Programme under Performance Monitoring.

The Margam Park Business Plan report has been removed from the Forward Work Programmes but will be re-programmed at a future date. Members requested early engagement in relation to the Margam Park Business Plan.

Members raised concern about the current method for selecting items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for scrutiny.

Officers confirmed that members would have the opportunity to share their views during the forthcoming scrutiny review.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

8. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

Councillor D.Thomas

Vice-Chairperson