

EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

12 October 2017

Chairperson: Councillor A.L.Thomas

Vice Chairperson: Councillor M.Crowley

Councillors: S. ap Dafydd, S.Harris, N.T.Hunt, H.N.James, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Renkes, R.L.Taylor, D.Whitelock, C.Williams and A. Amor

Co-opted Voting Members: M.Caddick, A Amor

Co-opted Non Voting Members: A.Hughes

Officers In Attendance C.Millis, A.Thomas, J.Merrifield, R.Gordon, P.Walker, Jones, A.Spooner-Cleverly and S. Curran

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.R.Lockyer and P.A.Rees

The Committee welcomed Adam Amor, the new Co-Opted Member to his first meeting.

1. **MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON SEPTEMBER 14TH 2017**

The Committee noted that the Co-Opted Members did not appear on the minutes as attendees. The Democratic Services Officer apologised for the administration error and would rectify the minutes so that accurate attendance is portrayed.

Cllr Steffan Ap Dafydd asked that his name be amended to be spelt correctly.

With the above amendments the Committee noted the minutes.

2. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

3. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

3.1 **Christmas and New Year Opening Times, Libraries, Theatres, Community Centres, Margam Country Park, Leisure Centres and Swimming Pools 2017-18.**

Members received information relating to the Christmas and New Year opening times as contained within the circulated report.

Members questioned the difference in opening times between the different leisure facilities. Officers explained that the discrepancies were due to the historical use of facilities over the festive period, the number of direct debits associated with the facility and the size of its membership.

Following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

3.2 **Financing Schools- Reviewing the Funding Formula to raise standards.**

Members received information in relation to proposed changes to the formula for funding primary sector schools as contained within the circulated report.

The Committee noted that the school estate has changed significantly since 2011 and the current funding formula no longer reflects the balance between smaller and larger schools and that the NPT Schools Forum had requested a review of the current arrangements.

The Chairperson drew the Committee's attention to the fact that the recommendation before the Cabinet Board was to approve consultation on the proposed formula review and that the

decision taken by the Cabinet Board would be for immediate implementation. Members noted an error in the report in that the results of the consultation would be presented back to the Committee in mid -January and not January 4th 2018 as stated.

Officers explained in order to deliver education the total amount of money to be distributed to schools is determined by the current formula; this formula neither increases or decreases the amount of money in the Individual Schools Budget but is the mechanism by which the Budget is distributed amongst individual schools and Officers explained in detail how the current formula operates.

Members heard how the Review Group established had provided professional advice on how the formula could deliver more equitable funding to schools and comprised of Head Teachers from large and small schools serving both rural and urban areas and had examined the current primary sector formula line by line. Officers explained in detail the review group's proposal for the proposed changes to the funding formula for primary sector schools.

Members noted the proposal to limit the financial benefit resulting from the revised formula for those schools with reserves in excess of £75k and queried where this figure had come from. Officers explained that the Welsh Government limit is £50k but this figure has been derived from careful analysis of the data via a fair and transparent process and they believe it is a fair, realistic and manageable figure. Officers stated that there are currently 8 schools with this amount of reserves but at this stage the schools who will benefit from the revised funding formula are unknown. The Committee asked if compulsory redundancies were anticipated as a result of this process. Officers stated that whilst this was a feasible concern, everything will be done to avoid this.

Members expressed concern that small schools appear to be in a cycle of decline and agreed that mitigation and helping small schools to plan is of utmost importance and asked if federation had been explored. Officers explained the 'Small Rural School' grant which the Welsh Government has committed to for the next 5 years but reiterated the importance of continual review of the school estate and ensuring the funding formula is fit for purpose.

The Committee queried the figures in relation to several of the schools and officers explained fully the data and background to the specific schools.

It was stated that the review of the funding formula was to allocate the funding to where the pupils are as this is fair and equitable.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

3.3 Transition Arrangements from the Communities First to the Employability Programme.

Members received information in relation to the transition Arrangements from the Communities First to the Employability Programme as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted that the funding for Communities First which has Worked locally in NPT since 2002 is due to finish in March 2018 and that Welsh Government has introduced an Employability Programme which will start in January 2018 which will be £12 million across the Country.

Members asked if the work would still be directed at areas of deprivation and officers explained that although Welsh Government have widened the areas, the priority will be on more deprived areas.

The Committee asked if the funding allocated would be affected by 'Brexit' and Officers confirmed that this money was not European money so will not be effected.

The Committee felt it was important that the accumulated memorabilia from Communities First such as photographs be returned to the communities and that 'Celebration Events' be explored.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON