

EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Room 1/2 - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

14 June 2018

Chairperson: Councillor A.L.Thomas

Vice Chairperson: Councillor M.Crowley

Councillors: S. ap Dafydd, M.Ellis, S.Harris, H.N.James, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Renkes, R.L.Taylor, A.J.Richards, D.Whitelock and R.Phillips

Co-opted Voting Members M. Caddick and A. Amor

Officers In Attendance A.Thomas, M.Daley, J.Burge and K.Gilbert

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

Observers Ms.E.Bradfield

1. **MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 MAY 2018**

The Committee noted the minutes.

2. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19.**

Members were informed that the forward work planner had been updated, but it was still in draft form as there were outstanding items to be added. Members referred to the discussions held at the recent forward work programme workshop held in May, and referred to the two suggestions made by Members for task and finish projects, which included the role and support of school governors, and healthy schools/obesity. The Committee agreed to prioritise the task and finish project for healthy schools/obesity, which would be scoped and

brought back to a later meeting for comment.

The Committee noted the forward work programme.

3. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

3.1 Welsh Government Feminine Hygiene Grant

The Committee received information in relation to the Welsh Government Feminine Hygiene Grant as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried why an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) had not been completed and attached to the report. Officers explained that the report was for information only, and that it was generally held that reports for information were not usually subject to EIAs. Members commented that it may have been useful to complete an EIA to demonstrate the positive impact that this particular item had made.

Members questioned whether the grant money received from Welsh Government (WG) covered the schools' costs for purchasing feminine hygiene products. Officers stated that the grant subsidised the costs and eased the financial pressure on schools, but did not cover all the costs. Officers informed Members that once the grant money ceased the schools would have to pay the full cost from their own budget once again.

Members queried the timescale for purchasing the products using the grant funding and distributing them to the schools. Officers explained that the schools were already providing products to pupils from their own budgets. Officers added that the only potential delay in using the grant funding would be if WG specified that the money would have to be spent on vending machines to distribute products to pupils; otherwise it was envisaged that there would be no issue as the products would be given out via the existing mechanisms already established by the schools.

Members queried whether there was any data available which could provide an indication of how many pupils relied on products from the

schools, in order to try to understand the magnitude of the situation. Officers stated that no specific data had been collected to date, but it was possible that the information could be obtained from the records held by the schools on the number of products purchased and the number of products distributed to pupils. Officers added that it had been previously deemed unnecessary to quantify as the schools were responding to the problem, and pupils were receiving the products that they required.

Members questioned whether pupils in special needs schools were also receiving feminine hygiene products. Officers confirmed that all schools including special needs schools were providing products free of charge to pupils.

Members queried whether work was being progressed across the various portfolios to look at how pupils who were unable pay for feminine hygiene products could receive them free of charge outside of school times. Officers acknowledged that there was currently no provision to provide products for pupils outside school times, and agreed that this needed to be looked at. Members questioned whether officers had spoken to other organisations who were currently providing similar support to young girls such as Wings Cymru. Officers commented that they were not aware of the organisation and stated that they would make enquiries.

Members questioned whether a portion of the grant money could be used to purchase sanitary disposal bins, as there was a significant cost associated with emptying the bins. Officers confirmed that the grant could be used in this way, but the bins were already in place in the schools.

Members questioned whether it was possible for the primary schools and comprehensive schools to share a common practice for distributing products in order to ease transition from one school to the next, and to ensure that pupils were familiar with the process for receiving products. Officers explained that they were not entirely sure of the practices in place in the secondary schools, as each school had their own different practice which appeared to be working. Officers noted the suggestion from Members to introduce a common practice in the primary schools and secondary schools.

Members queried whether it was possible to ascertain the cost of providing feminine hygiene products to pupils throughout the borough, inside and outside school term time. Officers stated that

there were systems in place in the schools for recording how much stock had been purchased and issued to pupils. Officers added that this information could be used to provide an estimate of the cost, and that it would be reported back to the Committee.

Members suggested that further research may be required around the issue of feminine hygiene products, as national statistics showed that one in ten 14 to 21 year olds could not afford to buy feminine hygiene products. Members stated that there could be potential issues with regard to attendance at schools as a result of period poverty, and that it may be worth collecting figures for school absences as a result. Officers informed Members that the issue had been acknowledged, and was being addressed and dealt with accordingly. Officers stated that the schools had removed the barrier and that the pupils had access to the products; however officers acknowledged that it would be worth enquiring with the schools if there were any further issues. Officers added that the issue could be wider as some pupils did not always have support at home, and some of the issues could fall under the remit of other committees too. Members suggested that placing the item on the agenda for school governors could be one way of collecting data. Members commented that there were support workers that went to pupils' homes to investigate cases of school absences and that they may be able to contribute to the data collection.

Members commented that the installation of vending machines was an unnecessary expense, as money could be more effectively spent on products. Members proposed that the Committee write to Julie James, Assembly Member, for clarity regarding the conditions of the WG grant in order to establish whether there was a requirement to purchase vending machines to distribute products to pupils, or if products could be distributed using the existing practices in the schools. Members urged officers to write to the Assembly Member also.

Member questioned whether the grant money would be monitored and audited. Officers explained that as part of the condition of the grant a highlight monitoring report had to be provided to WG to account for how the money was spent. Officers added that the report would be brought back to the committee for information.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

3.2 Health Care Needs Policy

The Committee received information in relation to the Health Care Needs Policy as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried how the principles and practices outlined in the policy could be carried out with no additional funding available, particularly when arranging training for staff. Officers stated that there had never been funding available. Officers informed Members that head teachers had previously received training which was still relevant. Officers explained that the guidance received from Welsh Government was comprehensive and had been circulated to all schools for reference.

Members queried how teachers identified pupils with disabilities as they were not always visual, and some symptoms were not visible until later on in teenage years. Members commented that identifying disabilities and arranging support in a reasonable timeframe was difficult. Officers explained that the policy provided detailed guidance and best practice. Officers added that a lot of the work had already been done with the schools on the matter.

Members questioned whether the arrangements for the administration of medicines to pupils had been resolved. Officers stated that they were currently in discussions with the unions. Officers informed Members that the option was being explored to pay teachers and teaching assistants an honorarium rate for administering medication to pupils. Officers explained that the matter was complicated as the needs of pupils differed from school to school. Officers added that it was difficult to produce a policy that suited all schools. Members questioned whether officers were satisfied that there was a satisfactory approach in place in each school. Officers stated that they were satisfied with the approach in each school, but there was an issue with regard to payments to staff for providing this additional service for pupils.

Members commented that an EIA could have been included with the report to demonstrate the positive impact of the policy. Officers explained that consideration was given to the need for an EIA, however, it was determined that as the report set out policy expectations in terms of health care plans provided by schools and did not contain recommendations that could be quantified it was felt no EIA was necessary; however officers noted the comments made

by Members in relation to the positive impact.

Members referred to governor training and the points raised on page three of the policy, and acknowledged the immense responsibility on new governors. Members commended officers on the development and modernisation of the training for governors. Officers stated that new ways were always being explored to promote training and to make access easier. Officers added that online training was currently being looked at, as well as varying timeslots for physical training and arranging training sessions in various communities instead of at the civic centres only.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposal to be considered by Cabinet Board.

3.3 Quarterly Performance Management Data 2017-2018

The Committee received information in relation to Quarter 4 Performance Management Data (2017/18) as contained within the circulated report.

Members commented on indicators 27 and 28 regarding the decrease in visits to leisure centres and libraries, and queried whether the figures referred to Authority owned buildings only. Officers confirmed that the information only applied to Authority owned buildings, as there was no mechanism in place to collect data from outsourced and privately owned leisure centres. Officers added that the data was only useful in monitoring information on Council owned facilities.

Members queried why there was a slight rise in permanent school exclusions. Officers explained that there were no issues generally across the board, but there were specific issues in a couple of schools which was pushing the overall figure up slightly.

Officers informed Members that there was an event arranged the following week at the Princess Royal Theatre to encourage schools to register with UNISEF. Members requested a report on the Respect agenda and a report on the outcome of the UNISEF event. Members requested for both reports to be brought back to the Committee in September/October.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON